

Iowa governor signs unconstitutional “heartbeat” bill that bans most abortions

Kate Randall
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Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, a Republican, signed a highly restrictive abortion bill into law on Friday. If the bill goes into effect as planned on July 1, a woman in Iowa seeking an abortion after about six weeks gestation will be forced to travel outside the state to terminate her pregnancy or carry it to term.

The “heartbeat” legislation bans abortions once a fetal heartbeat has been detected, at about six weeks, with exceptions made in cases of rape, incest or medical emergency. Doctors would be required to perform an ultrasound to determine whether the heartbeat is detectable. If a heartbeat is detected, a doctor must inform a woman that an abortion is prohibited by law, and the woman must sign a form indicating she has received the information.

A doctor who violates the bill, Senate File 359, will be charged with a Class C felony. According to Iowa Code Chapter 902, a Class C felony conviction is punishable by a maximum prison term not to exceed 10 years, which may be deferred or suspended, and a fine of at least \$1,000 but no more than \$10,000.

As critics of the measure have pointed out, many women at six weeks may not even be aware that they are pregnant. The reactionary measure flies in the face of the fundamental right of a woman to abortion, as codified in the 1973 US Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*. The high court ruled then that states cannot ban abortions before viability, when a fetus can survive outside the womb, which doctors today typically place at around 24 weeks.

Dr. Jamila Perritt, a fellow with Physicians for Reproductive Health, which advocates for contraception and abortion rights, explained to Vox:

“The likelihood that an individual can miss her period, get a pregnancy test, then make an appointment to see an abortion provider, take time off of work if

she’s working, find child care for her other children, get in to get her abortion and have all of that done prior to a six-week time period is absolutely unrealistic and unreasonable.”

As the first female governor of Iowa, Reynolds has the distinction of signing legislation that will deny women in the state their reproductive and constitutional rights. It is clear that working class women will pay the highest price, through unwanted pregnancies, lost hours of work to travel outside Iowa for abortions, or through seeking back-alley abortions which place their health and lives at risk.

NARAL Pro-Choice America President Ilyse Hogue issued a statement reading in part: “This is a sad day for women and families in Iowa—their legislature and governor has thrown away their ability to plan their families and their futures. ... This law is not just about the women and families of Iowa, it’s about all Americans having the right to decide if, when, and how to have a family.”

The America Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Iowa is reportedly drafting a legal challenge to the Iowa legislation, but has not revealed the steps it will take. ACLU of Iowa told *Newsweek* that the bill’s passage is “an affront to the fundamental concept of a woman’s right to an abortion” as laid out by *Roe v. Wade*.

The same day that Governor Reynolds signed the Iowa legislation, the Republican-controlled Senate in South Carolina voted 24-21 to end efforts to pass a virtual abortion ban, after Senate Democrats vowed a marathon filibuster against the bill.

The abortion ban sought to restrict the procedure to cases of rape, incest or a threat to the mother’s life. Critics of the legislation said it would have banned 97 percent of the approximately 5,700 abortions performed in South Carolina each year, on average.

President Donald Trump promised during his presidential campaign to end abortion rights. He ignorantly pledged that he would appoint anti-abortion judges to the Supreme Court and that *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned “automatically.” Although such statements expose Trump’s ignorance of how the Court actually functions, his presidency has emboldened anti-abortion forces in many states to pass restrictive legislation with hopes that challenges to these laws would be heard by the high court justices, who could potentially overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

A ban on abortions after 15 weeks was signed into law by Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant in March. The law contains exceptions for medical emergencies and severe fetal abnormalities, but none for rape or incest. It is being challenged in court by the Jackson Women’s Health Organization, the state’s last abortion clinic. On May 1, a judge granted a temporary restraining order blocking the law for 10 days.

On March 27, the Kentucky House of Representatives passed a bill banning dilation and evacuation, a procedure often used in abortions if a patient is over 11 weeks pregnant. The bill, which was signed into law by Governor Matt Bevin in April, is also facing a court challenge.

Governor Eric Holcomb of Indiana signed a bill on March 25 requiring doctors who treat patients for complications of abortion to inform on them to the state. In an effort to track and stigmatize women for their private medical decisions, doctors would be required to provide to authorities these patients’ age, race and county of residence, among other details.



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