

Oklahoma passes Texas-style anti-abortion legislation

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The Oklahoma legislature passed an anti-abortion bill on Thursday that prohibits the procedure after six weeks of pregnancy, before many women know they are pregnant, and allows private citizens to file civil lawsuits against abortion providers.

The bill is patterned after a bill with essentially the same provisions that took effect in Texas last September.

Both bills effectively ban abortions, in defiance of existing US law as codified in the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling. The Oklahoma abortion ban will be implemented as soon as it is signed into law by Republican Governor Kevin Stitt, due to an "emergency clause" incorporated into the measure.

Senate Bill 1503, also known as the "Oklahoma Heartbeat Act," prohibits abortions after a physician can detect early cardiac activity in an embryo or fetus. The law provides exceptions for when the mother's life is at risk, but not for rape or incest. SB 1503 was passed by the Republican-dominated House without any debate. Stitt is expected to sign it within days.

"We want Oklahoma to be the most pro-life state in the country," Stitt said earlier this month, adding, "We want to outlaw abortion in the state of Oklahoma."

Hours after the House passed SB 1503 and sent it to the governor, the state Senate passed House Bill 4327. That version also allows private citizens to bring civil lawsuits against abortion providers. However, it prohibits abortions at any stage of pregnancy, with exceptions for medical emergencies and sexual assault. It has yet to be voted on by the House.

The Oklahoma bill is the latest to be passed by state governments severely restricting abortion rights. It is part of a country-wide movement by Republican-led states to curtail abortion and other democratic rights. After the US Supreme Court refused to take up an

emergency appeal and allowed Texas' law to remain in effect, numerous other GOP-led states passed similar laws. Idaho's governor signed the first Texas-inspired measure in March, although it has been temporarily blocked by the state's Supreme Court.

Oklahoma's abortion ban will have significant consequences beyond the state's borders. Since the law in Texas went into effect seven months ago, thousands of women have flocked to Oklahoma to receive the procedure. A recent study by the Texas Policy Evaluation Project at the University of Texas at Austin found that approximately 1,500 women traveled out of state every month to receive an abortion since September, with 45 percent visiting Oklahoma for the procedure.

The passage of the anti-abortion legislation comes ahead of a Supreme Court decision in June, in which the court will review a 15-week abortion ban in Mississippi and decide the future of *Roe v. Wade*.

The decades-long counterrevolution against *Roe v. Wade* has eviscerated access to an abortion. Today, approximately 90 percent of all US counties have no abortion provider and seven US states have only a single abortion provider in the entire state. Twenty-seven large American cities have no abortion provider, with Texas being home to the largest number of cities in the United States where a patient must travel more than 100 miles for an abortion.

The unraveling of abortion rights will have a disproportionate effect on working class women, many of whom cannot afford to travel to another state for an abortion, potentially forcing women to seek unsafe procedures that greatly increase the risk of death or mutilation.

The attack on the right to abortion is bound up with the broader assault on democratic rights in the US.

Amid the colossal growth of social inequality, the American ruling class is increasingly relying on more authoritarian means of rule. All claims that putting Democrats in office, including the White House, will secure the right of women to terminate pregnancy have been shattered. The same applies to voting rights, the right to due process, the fight against capital punishment and protection from police violence.

As with all other democratic rights, the fight to defend abortion rights can be won only through the mobilization of the working class in a struggle to abolish the capitalist system.



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