

Oklahoma implements strictest abortion ban in US

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On Wednesday night, Oklahoma's Republican Governor Kevin Stitt signed into law the most stringent abortion ban in the United States, making the state the first to effectively end all access to the procedure since the leak of the Supreme Court's draft decision on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.

The bill, HB 4327, takes effect immediately and allows private citizens to sue anyone who "aids or abets" a woman seeking an abortion at any point in her pregnancy, with exceptions for medical emergencies or if the pregnancy was a result of rape, sexual assault or incest and was reported to law enforcement. State lawmakers approved the ban enforced by civil lawsuits rather than criminal prosecution, similar to a Texas law that was passed last year.

According to the text of the bill, abortion "means the act of using, prescribing, administering, procuring, or selling of any instrument, medicine, drug, or any other substance, device, or means with the purpose to terminate the pregnancy of a woman." The law does not allow the woman seeking the abortion to be pursued and still allows the sale of morning-after pills and other types of emergency contraception.

"I promised Oklahomans that as governor I would sign every piece of pro-life legislation that came across my desk, and I am proud to keep that promise today," Stitt said in a statement. "From the moment life begins at conception is when we have a responsibility as human beings to do everything we can to protect that baby's life and the life of the mother."

All four of Oklahoma's abortion clinics announced they would stop, if they had not already, terminating pregnancies immediately upon the law taking effect.

It is unclear what will happen to women who qualify under the law's exception for abortions necessary to save the life of a pregnant woman experiencing a

medical emergency. State Representative Wendi Stearman, the author of the law, claimed doctors will be able to decide which women qualify for abortions in hospitals. However, many medical professionals have criticized the exception as vague and unclear.

Abortion providers and reproductive rights groups have vowed to challenge the law, but Texas-style abortion bans have proved difficult to stop in the courts because they use civil enforcement rather than criminal prosecution to ban abortions.

The governor's signature came as many Republican state governments pushed strict abortion measures in anticipation of the US Supreme Court overturning the right to abortion established in *Roe v. Wade*. Multiple states have passed so-called "trigger laws" that would eliminate access to abortion across much of the South immediately following a decision from the high court to reverse *Roe*.

Earlier this month, a leaked draft opinion written by Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito showed that the extreme right-wing majority court was poised to strike down the right to an abortion. The final opinion in the case is not expected until late June, but there has been no indication the court will reverse its course.

The bill signed into law on Wednesday is one of at least three anti-abortion bills that have been sent to Stitt's desk this year. Stitt had already signed into law two other abortion bans, including one directly modeled after Texas' "heartbeat" bill, which bars abortions after six weeks of pregnancy. That law will take effect this summer if it is not blocked by the state Supreme Court. Another law makes it a felony to perform an abortion, punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

The Oklahoma bans would eliminate access to abortion to women and families across the South,

devastating not only Oklahomans but also Texans, many of whom traveled to seek abortion care after Texas implemented its ban last September. A recent study by the Texas Policy Evaluation Project found that about 1,500 women traveled out of state every month to receive an abortion since September, with 45 percent visiting Oklahoma for the procedure.

Now, many Oklahomans will have to travel out of state for the procedure and Texans may have to travel even farther. This will have a disproportionate effect on working class women, many of whom do not have the resources to travel for an abortion, potentially forcing women to seek unsafe procedures that greatly increase the risk of death or mutilation.

Democratic officials have politically dominated the spontaneous protests in response to the impending Supreme Court ruling abolishing abortion rights, in an effort to contain the mass anger and opposition and to betray it.

The Democratic Party has shown it will do nothing to actually oppose the assault on democratic rights. At least two Democratic senators, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Robert Casey of Pennsylvania, oppose abortion rights, and leading Democrats have repeatedly stated opposition to repealing the anti-democratic filibuster.

The right to abortion is a democratic right that can only be defended through the mobilization of the working class in a struggle to abolish the capitalist system. The demand must be raised for free abortion and birth control services as part of a socialist health care system guaranteeing high quality medical care for every man, woman and child.



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