

20-WEEK ABORTION BAN

By Rep. Tommy Gregory, R-Sarasota and Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez, R-Doral

20-week abortion bans are cruel attempts to impose restrictions on access to abortion. HB 351 and SB 744 are rooted in opposition to safe and legal abortion and not credible medical evidence.

Patients need health care providers, not politicians, to help make these difficult decisions

Every person, no matter where they live, should make their own personal, private health care decisions without politicians standing in the way. This bill poses a serious threat to reproductive health, ignoring a pregnant person's individual needs and circumstances and seeking to ban abortions at 20 weeks.

These abortion bans ignore real world situations

Unfortunately, 20-week bans are already the law in some states, so we have already seen what happens when politicians interfere in pregnancy decisions and tie doctors' hands. In these states, some individuals and families have been put into unimaginable situations because these abortion bans fail to account for real world situations.

For example, pregnant people with cancer, diabetes, epilepsy or other seizure disorders, and high blood pressure may face dangerous complications at or past 20 weeks that can put their health in serious jeopardy.

In addition, often a fetal diagnosis may not be detected until past 20 weeks when it is common to have a second ultra-sound. Some pregnant people may find their pregnancy is not viable, faces serious health issues or poses serious risks to the pregnant person themselves if they carry to term.

Other reasons a pregnant person may not be able to access abortion care before 20 weeks include a lack of funds, a lack of transportation, difficulty overcoming abortion restrictions such as parental consent, intimate partner violence and more.

In these situations, it is crucial for a pregnant person to have the opportunity to think through their options based on their unique situation in consultation with people they trust, including their physicians, loved ones, counselors, religious leaders and others – but not politicians.

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These laws banning abortion are not designed to improve health outcomes, but rather to shame, pressure and punish people who have decided to have an abortion.

Doctors oppose these laws because they prevent health care providers from giving their patients the best health care possible in an individual situation.

Unconstitutional and out of touch with science and our values

Advocates of the 20-week ban defend it with assertions about “fetal pain”, but these claims are not supported by science. The world’s leading medical institutions that establish standards for reproductive health care agree that, before 26 weeks of gestation, the fetus does not possess the structural and functional neurological capacity to experience pain.

These unpopular attacks on reproductive health are out of touch with American values. Once Americans understand the real-world circumstances surrounding abortion at different points in pregnancy, they overwhelmingly oppose these bans.

The U.S. Constitution precludes states from banning abortion before viability for any reason. The United States Supreme Court’s 2016 decision on abortion rights, *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt*, reaffirmed that abortion is a constitutionally protected right subject to heightened judicial scrutiny.

Addressing the unprecedented public health crisis posed by COVID-19 must be the legislature’s top priority – not making it harder to access a constitutionally protected and safe health care procedure like abortion.