

# Florida ultrasound bill vetoed; other states looking at similar bills

WASHINGTON – Although Florida Gov. Charlie Crist vetoed a bill that would have required women to have an ultrasound before a first-trimester abortion, similar legislation is having more success in other states.

In Louisiana, a bill requiring ultrasounds before all abortions is awaiting the signature of Gov. Bobby Jindal, who has said he supports the legislation. In Michigan, where an ultrasound already is required before an abortion, a Senate committee is considering a bill that would mandate high-quality images from the best ultrasound equipment available at the facility where the abortion is performed.

Sheila Hopkins, associate director for social concerns and Respect Life at the Florida Catholic Conference in Tallahassee, called Crist's June 11 veto of the ultrasound requirement "a sad day for Florida women."

"Many women have lamented their decision (to have an abortion) and wish they could have viewed an ultrasound before making a choice that they now deeply regret," Hopkins said. "Without this bill in place, women will continue to make a life-altering decision without the benefit of informed consent."

Currently in Florida, ultrasounds are required before all second- and third-trimester abortions in order to determine the gestational age and location of the fetus. The Florida Catholic Conference estimated that more than 80 percent of abortion clinics in the state already perform ultrasounds before first-trimester abortions.

The legislation would not have required women to look at the ultrasound images or hear a description of them. It also would have exempted victims of rape, incest, domestic violence or human trafficking from the requirement.

Crist said in his veto message that the bill "places an inappropriate burden on a woman seeking to terminate a pregnancy."

The Louisiana bill sent to the governor June 16 requires that an ultrasound be

performed before an abortion and that the woman having the abortion be informed of her right to view a photograph of the ultrasound or hear a description of what it shows.

As originally introduced, the legislation had required women seeking an abortion to hear a description of the fetus, including its dimensions and whether arms, legs or internal organs were visible, and to receive a photograph of the ultrasound. Those requirements were removed by a Senate committee, however.

State Sen. Sharon Weston Broome, a Democrat who is chief sponsor of the legislation, said it “empowers women” and noted that at least 15 other states have a similar requirement.

According to testimony during the debate on the bill, more than 95 percent of women receiving abortions in Louisiana already have ultrasounds performed.

The Michigan proposal now before the Senate Judiciary Committee would strengthen a 2006 law requiring the ultrasounds. Pro-life advocates contended that those performing the ultrasounds in abortion clinics were deliberately using older equipment to produce blurry images for the women before their abortions but were using newer, state-of-the-art equipment when performing the abortions.

The bill states: “The physician or person assisting the physician shall ensure that the most technologically advanced ultrasound equipment available at that location is used for the ultrasound examination, for viewing an active ultrasound image, and for creating the physical picture of the ultrasound image.”

At a June 15 committee hearing, representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union and the state chapter of the National Organization for Women opposed the bill as an unnecessary intrusion into the doctor-patient relationship. A representative of Citizens for Traditional Values spoke in favor, saying it would give women “one more source of information when considering her choice” of whether to have an abortion or not.

State Sen. Wayne Kuipers, a Republican who is primary sponsor of the legislation, said he expected the bill would be approved by the Michigan House and Senate but

could face a veto by Gov. Jennifer Granholm, a Democrat who supports keeping abortion legal.