

First hearing held on pre-abortion sonograms

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By **EMILY RAMSHAW** / The Dallas Morning News
eramshaw@dallasnews.com

AUSTIN – Emotions ran high Thursday as lawmakers had their first hearing on a bill that would require women seeking abortions to first get a sonogram of the fetus.

Abortion opponents said the bill by Sen. Dan Patrick, R-Houston, which would force doctors to perform the sonograms and check a heartbeat monitor at least two hours before the abortion, will remind women that they're considering terminating a human life. They say it still gives women a choice: the bill, as it's currently written, lets them to decide whether to see the image or listen to the heartbeat.

"Sonograms are very good for the women to see to know they have something there. They can make a choice of whether or not to keep that baby," said Elizabeth Ross, with the Austin Pregnancy Resource Center. "If that's not available to them, one day down the road when they do decide to have children ... what happened in the past is going to come back to them."

Critics of the bill say Texas is tough enough on women who are faced with a difficult decision, and that lawmakers should stay out of the relationship between women and their doctors. They say the measure would force doctors to perform medically unnecessary procedures, which could be against a patient's wishes.

"There seems to be no other law compelling a medical protocol for a physician," said Terri Burke, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas. "There's a real potential for women to feel intimidated, to feel they are assumed stupid, and even to be insulted by this."

The bill, which has strong support from Gov. Rick Perry, has gathered much attention at the Capitol.

In the last month, flocks of women who back abortion rights roamed the halls, carrying pink Planned Parenthood bags.

And women opposed to abortion held their own news conference, where a woman who was eight weeks pregnant was hooked up to a sonogram and a video of her fetus was projected onto a screen.



HARRY CABLUCK/The Associated Press
Sen. Dan Patrick (right) talks with Danielle Froehlich and Casey Calix of Austin after the couple's testimony about a pregnancy center visit. Patrick is sponsor of a bill to require ultrasounds before abortions.

A vote could come as soon as next week.