

NEWS



FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE JOHN FRITCHEY

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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New Abortion Notification Legislation Proposed

Advocates cite need to protect teen health and safety

Chicago – Calling for common-sense legislation to protect the health and well-being of young women, State Representative John Fritchey today was joined by Democratic and Republican legislators, healthcare providers and clergy to announce a new proposal that would require female minors to notify a responsible party prior to seeking an abortion in Illinois. House Bill 5840, the Adolescent Health Care Safety Act, comes in response to recently-published rules by the Illinois Supreme Court seeking to revive a dormant decade-old parental notification law passed by the General Assembly.

“It is obviously reassuring that most young women consult with a parent in determining whether or not to have an abortion,” said Rep. Fritchey. “The reality, however, is that when a young woman does not talk with a parent, there is a good reason. As such, we need common-sense legislation that recognizes this reality and protects the woman’s health and safety by providing her with other responsible options.”

“We must be vigilantly mindful that, in those rare instances where a young woman cannot talk with a parent, she is competent to make a decision about her pregnancy, and that she can make that decision with informed consent and without undue coercion by someone who does not share her best interest,” added Rep. Fritchey. “I would hope that my colleagues, regardless of their position on abortion, would have faith in family, clergy and medical professionals to give responsible counseling to a young woman seeking advice about her pregnancy.”

The proposed Adolescent Health Care Safety Act addresses the real-life circumstances faced by some young women, by requiring that prior to seeking an abortion, a minor must obtain counseling from an adult relative, licensed medical provider or clergy member. Counseling in these circumstances must include information about a decision to carry a pregnancy to term or to seek an abortion as well as a discussion regarding child care and adoption issues.

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In 1995, the Illinois legislature passed a law requiring a minor to notify a parent prior to seeking an abortion. In the absence of rules for the minor to seek a waiver of the requirements, a federal court enjoined enforcement of the law. Two weeks ago, and on the eve of upcoming statewide elections, the Illinois Supreme Court issued a set of rules, setting the stage for further litigation.

The Supreme Court rules set forth a judicial bypass procedure requiring a minor to petition the court in order to obtain a waiver from the parental notice requirements. Many health care professionals and public policy experts assert that the rules place an unreasonable burden on young females, threatening their health and well-being.

"Planned Parenthood is extremely concerned about the recent action of the Illinois Supreme Court and the revival of an outdated and insufficient parental notice law which puts politics before the health of our teens," stated Pamela Sutherland, President & CEO of the Illinois Planned Parenthood Council. "And as a healthcare provider, the health and safety of women is our utmost priority. We know the realities of what teens may be dealing with when faced with an unplanned pregnancy. That is why we support Representative Fritchey's legislation to allow another trusted adult to be notified when a teen is faced with a difficult decision regarding her pregnancy."

Rep. Fritchey acknowledges that legal challenges to the Supreme Court rules may be filed by either Attorney General Lisa Madigan or the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois. He contends, however, that the subject is best addressed by the elected officials in the Illinois General Assembly.

"Notwithstanding the curious timing of the Supreme Court's actions, this is an issue that deserves the full debate and consideration of the General Assembly, just as it did in 1995," added Rep. Fritchey. "This legislation is consciously neutral on the issue of whether or not to seek an abortion. Rather, it reflects the reality in which many minors find themselves, and provides the means for them to get appropriate counseling."

The Adolescent Health Care Safety Act already has garnered support by religious leaders including Randall Doubet-King, Associate Pastor of the Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ. Discussing the proposal, Pastor King said, "During my tenure as a minister I have counseled many women dealing with difficult situations, and I can tell you first hand how reassuring it is to them to be able to talk with someone they trust and have faith in."

While supporters are prepared to move the legislation in the upcoming Veto Session, they reiterated their intention to proceed when the Legislature reconvenes in January should the issue not be resolved prior to that time.