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Governor signs Assembly bill creating a legal shield for abortions in California

By Sora O'Doherty

A bill introduced by local Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan that creates a legal shield for abortion, was passed by the legislature and signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom and, as an urgency matter, came into effect immediately upon signing.

Assembly Bill 1666 protects those in California from civil liability for providing, aiding, or receiving abortion care. "Twenty-six million women nationwide are already facing near-total abortion bans, and the U.S. Supreme Court has abandoned its duty to ensure their equal rights," said Assemblymember Bauer-Kahan. "Extremist laws from anti-choice states are putting California and its providers in danger. AB 1666 creates a strong legal shield to ensure abortion care stays legal in our state."

AB 1666 declares that any legal action brought against the right to reproductive choice is against the public policy of California, and therefore will not be enforced by California courts. The right to an abortion is enshrined in California law. Because the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, laws like AB 1666 will be the primary bulwark to protect abortion rights. AB 1666 makes it possible for California to protect providers and patients in the face of an onslaught of reactionary and restrictive policies being enacted across the nation, according to the bill's sponsor. The bill was co-sponsored by 40 members of the Assembly.

"These precautions and protections are a key first step as California prepares for a post-*Roe* world, and unfortunately necessary given the increased hostility and frequency of abortion bans in other states seeking to target patients and providers," said Molly Robson, Legislative Director for Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California. "Taking this action now is crucial and we applaud the California Legislature for taking swift action on this legislation."

According to information provided from Bauer-Kahan's office, AB 1666 is part of a suite of bills from the California Future of Abortion Council, which convened community leaders, advocates, providers and policy makers to shape legislative and budget priorities for reproductive healthcare. The bill was developed in consultation with constitutional experts and abortion providers to speak to this unprecedented watershed moment for reproductive rights in the United States.

"I have seen the devastating effects of limiting access to abortion," said Dr. Selina Sandoval, MD, on behalf of the American College of OBGYN's District IX. "We are already seeing patients who were forced to delay their care, travel hundreds if not thousands of miles, and take time off that they can't afford just to undergo straightforward and safe medical procedures."

For 1.4 million women, California will soon be the closest state without an abortion ban. AB 1666 is a key piece of a larger legal framework that makes California a sanctuary state for abortion, said Bauer-Kahan. However, it should be noted that in the dissent to the judgment, the three dissenting Supreme Court justices wrote, "Most threatening of all, no language in today's decision stops the Federal Government from prohibiting abortions nationwide, once again from the moment of conception and without exceptions for rape or incest. If that happens, `the views of [an individual state's] citizens' will not matter. The challenge for a woman will be to finance a trip not to "New York [or] California" but to Toronto."

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