

Human Rights Watch

Children's Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/03/pregnant-girls-need-compassion-not-cruelty>

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The Florida state Senate has voted down several compassionate, common-sense amendments to [Senate Bill 404](#), which would limit girls access to abortion and undermine their right to health and privacy. Its not too late for the senators to change their minds.

The proposed law would require girls under 18 to obtain notarized written consent from a parent or legal guardian before an abortion, or seek a waiver from a judge.

[Florida law already requires](#) girls to notify a parent before an abortion or seek a judicial waiver. More than 200 girls sought such waivers last year.

I interviewed Florida attorneys and medical providers, who said that some girls fear violence, being kicked out of the home, alienated from their families or forced to continue a pregnancy against their wishes if they involve a parent. Others may not live with or be able to locate their parents. Requiring girls without parental support to plead their case before a judge is intimidating, and delays or prevents care.

Florida lawmakers have SB 404 on fast track and [it seems likely to pass](#). On Wednesday night, senators introduced several amendments to minimize the bills potential harm to some of the most vulnerable children in the state.

The pregnant girls who would be affected by this law are children in terrifyingly bleak situations without a loving parent. Its difficult to comprehend why anyone would oppose measures aimed at making the law more compassionate for them.

One amendment would have exempted girls pregnant from rape or incest, or survivors of human trafficking, from the consent requirement, to avoid forcing them to go to an abusive parent or relive their trauma in front of a judge.

Another would have required judges to consider whether a girl might suffer physical or emotional harm if the waiver is denied, as about 10% were last year.

A third would have allowed girls to obtain consent from a stepparent, grandparent or other trusted adult they have lived with for at least six months, in lieu of a parent or legal guardian.

Another would have required state officials to develop materials to train staff about the judicial waiver process, and another to disseminate information about the process to girls.

Last, an amendment would have established a pilot program to prevent unplanned pregnancy.

Senate Republicans rejected all the amendments, in strict party line votes.

A Senate floor vote on the bill is scheduled for Wednesday. Some senators supporting the bill seem to hope that when challenged in court the law will allow Floridas newly conservative Supreme Court to reinterpret the states right to privacy in a way that allows other abortion restrictions.

Florida legislators are sacrificing adolescent girls health and lives in a gamble to chip away at a constitutionally protected and internationally recognized right to access abortion.

SB 404 is dangerous and cruel, and legislators should reject it.

Margaret Wurth is a senior childrens rights researcher at Human Rights Watch.

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