

Aborting Women's Rights

On Wednesday, September 1st, 2021, Texas government officials passed a law banning abortions after six weeks of pregnancy. Since then, a plethora of heated controversy regarding abortion rights has erupted throughout the United States. This controversy is being driven by two groups: pro-choice and pro-life. Pro-lifers argue that a fetus is a child the moment it is conceived, and a large part of their reasoning stands on the basis of religion. Therefore, many believe that abortion is considered murder. However, pro-choicers do not agree that it is morally correct to force one's belief onto someone else. With the Christian demographic of Texas so large, the recently enacted Texas Heartbeat Act presents as a major win for the pro-life movement. Unfortunately, those who voted for this law failed to acknowledge future implications concerning women's rights because they choose to value and enforce their own ideals. While the Texas Heartbeat Act may seem beneficial to some, it actually holds the power to impose long-lasting detrimental effects on women's lives in Texas.

The Texas Heartbeat Act disregards and punishes women for situations that they cannot control, such as those involving rape or incest. Victims of rape or incest often face nearly insurmountable amounts of trauma from the experience alone. The Texas Heartbeat Act refuses to take into account the victims in these scenarios who have been forced into pregnancy. Not only must they deal with the copious amounts of emotional and mental stress, but they are forced to confront the overwhelming reality that they might be pregnant because of the offender's actions. Furthermore, the new Texas Heartbeat Act prevents those who are pregnant from getting an abortion after six weeks of pregnancy. However, Texas Governor Greg Abbott justifies the law since it "doesn't force victims of rape and incest to carry their pregnancy to term because it 'provides at least 6 weeks for a person to be able to get an abortion'" (Cohen). Unfortunately, due to the variance of pregnancy symptoms, some "people don't notice symptoms until a few months into their pregnancy," according to Planned Parenthood (Attia). This means that victims themselves may not know that they are pregnant until well past the cutoff period for termination in Texas. Being unable to terminate a pregnancy or deal with the outcome for at least another nine months causes substantial anxiety. As such, when forced to carry out a physically straining pregnancy as a result of sexual assault, victims can face a whole other host of complications such as postpartum depression, trauma, and possibly even suicide. The prevalent neglect in the Texas Heartbeat Act in regards to cases of sexual assault vividly highlights the extremely damaging repercussions brought on by the enforcement of the law. By disregarding the physical and mental health of women in Texas, the Texas legislation is rapidly stripping away the rights of the women in regards to their own bodies, forcing them to endure long-term physical and mental stress.

With the enactment of the Texas abortion law, women are manipulated into believing that fetal viability is more valuable than their own lives, safety, and well-being. Pro-lifers, especially those in Texas, argue that a fetus becomes a life at conception. They believe that it is living and deserves the same rights as any other human being. According to a reading titled "An Argument That Abortion Is Wrong," "[f]etuses are both human and alive," and because "[h]umans have the right to life ... fetuses have the right to life" (Marquis). Although some may consider a fetus as "living", it does not endure all of the physical stressors that a mother to be has to experience

during pregnancy, such as high blood pressure, infections, and in serious cases, death. Even still, many pro-lifers in Texas claim that since the fetus can experience “unreflective pain . . . mediated by the developing function of the nervous system as early as 12 weeks,” the process of termination will actually do more harm than good (Sobolik). However, Kate Connors, a spokesperson for the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, contests this claim, stating that “based on gestational age, the fetus is not capable of feeling pain until the third trimester” (Miller). The third trimester does not begin until around 27 weeks of pregnancy. Before then, the fetus’s nervous system has not developed enough for its brain to send pain signals to the rest of its body. The majority of abortions occur within the first two trimesters, before the fetus can feel anything. Therefore, it is safe to say that when aborted, a majority of the fetuses do not feel pain. Those that do are most likely terminated to prevent harmful implications for the mother. To reiterate, the Texas Heartbeat Act prevents women from getting an abortion six weeks into their pregnancy. By this time period, although the fetus cannot feel pain, pro-lifers in Texas still incriminate women for being irresponsible or financially incapable of raising a child. By putting this immense pressure and manipulating the women of Texas to avoid abortions, pro-lifers are creating a stigma around abortion that shames women into neglecting their wellbeing by not getting an abortion when necessary.

The societal pressures that women in Texas face has proven to put them further in danger because it prompts them to undergo unsafe procedures for fear of backlash from the Texan pro-life community. Some abortion care providers even emphasize that “they no longer feel as if they are able to continue safely providing this care in Texas” (Gerson). This could put women in need of an abortion in serious danger because the route of pursuing an unsafe abortion may not be successful or there could be unforeseen side effects that wouldn’t have occurred had a safe abortion been performed. Another alternative that women may turn to is traveling out of state to get an abortion in a state where it is legal. In this case, there are also drawbacks since not everyone has the financial means to travel across state lines. Disproportionately affected women, such as those with financial struggles, therefore, will be forced to carry the pregnancy to term or perform the procedure unsafely. Both equally dangerous options will have damaging effects on women which could have been otherwise avoided by not enacting the Texas Heartbeat Act.

Women in Texas also fear the enforcement of the new legislation because it gives people more of a reason to antagonize women while lauding those who emphasize the antagonism. A new policy in the Texas Heartbeat Act allows citizens of Texas to report and sue anyone who aids a women in getting an abortion for up to 10,000 dollars plus legal fees. This policy not only, as some news outlets put it, “turns citizens into bounty hunters” (Picchi), but also empowers and encourages those who have violated women to do more harm to them. For instance, if a woman seeks help to get an abortion as a victim of rape or incest, her offender is legally allowed to report her and receive a payout for sexual assault. While Texas Governor Greg Abbott claims that Texas will nonetheless strive to “eliminate all rapists from the streets” by “aggressively going out and arresting them and prosecuting them,” Amy Jones, the CEO of the Dallas Area Rape Crisis Center, argues that “if it were that easy, rape would no longer exist” (McCammon). Instead of eradicating rape, this law incentivizes perpetrators to further harm the women of Texas. Texas government officials will more likely smudge the boundaries of what is or is not considered rape in order to validate the policies of the Texas Heartbeat Act. The law then

becomes a way for offenders to once again target victims for their own benefit, further abusing the women of Texas.

Since the enactment of the Texas Heartbeat Act on September 1st, 2021, there has been an outstanding uproar from individuals and communities with varied viewpoints. While the law may seem like a tremendous victory for the pro-life Texan community, it is vitally important to recognize that the manipulative and harmful nature of the law can and will serve to hurt and antagonize the women of Texas in the future.

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