

House eyes repeal of 1840s abortion law

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A bill to decriminalize abortion is on the state House of Representatives' agenda after clearing a friendly Judiciary Committee.

"Anti-abortion laws are vestiges of the Dark Ages," said Arlene S. Law, a retired University of Michigan professor who admitted having an

abortion in 1957 when she was a 17-year-old high school honors student in Birmingham.

The committee gave 11-6 support Tuesday to House Bill 5170, which would amend the penal code by repealing an 1840s law making it a felony to perform an abortion. Sponsor is Rep. Teola Hunter, D-Detroit.

THE PANEL didn't vote, however, on a companion "freedom of

choice" bill by Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield.

Berman's HB 5211 says the state couldn't compel a woman either to terminate or continue her pregnancy. Berman cited other states where developmentally disabled women were forced into sterilization.

"That is abhorrent," she said. "The Legislature should remove itself from the abortion issue."

The Judiciary Committee, chaired by the pro-choice Rep. Perry Bullard, D-Ann Arbor, has yet to look at a Senate-passed bill to require girls 17 and under to get either parental or probate court permission for an abortion.

The Senate Human Services Committee is looking at four other bills to place state regulations on abortions following last summer's U.S. Supreme Court rulings.

THE LAW making the performing of an abortion a felony is unconstitutional but still legally valid, experts told the committee.

Thus, if the U.S. Supreme Court should reverse the landmark 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision protecting the right to abortion, Michigan would be in a position to prosecute doctors, nurses and hospitals which perform them.

One of the six nay votes was cast by Rep. David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield.

"It was quite a surprise" that the Hunter bill came up, he said after the hearing. "I just got notice of it yesterday. No one from the other side was prepared to testify."

Honigman, an attorney, was bothered by the possibility that Hunter's

'I can't understand why people object to safe, legal abortions.'

— Arlene S. Law
retired professor

bill might make it impossible to prosecute one who performs an abortion on a viable fetus in even the ninth month of pregnancy.

But in the hearing, Bullard said another section of the penal code prohibits abortion of a viable fetus.

Only Right to Life opposed the measure. "There would be a public policy vacuum (if the Roe decision were overturned)," said RTL spokesman Ed River.

BUT IF THE anti-abortion forces were barely geared up, pro-choice forces were.

Bullard happily announced that the American Civil Liberties Union, League of Women Voters, National Organization of Women of Ann Arbor, National Lawyers Guild and National Council Against Domestic Violence and others were there in support.

The personal abortion story came from Dr. Law, who said she lived in Honigman's West Bloomfield district when "I became pregnant in the back seat of a Chevy" at her older brother's Hillsdale College fraternity party in 1957.

Law, a retired U-M professor of education and now a Hartland resident, said that after an unnamed Birmingham gynecologist scolded her, she had considered suicide and a

the 1840s law should be repealed because it hasn't been used in years.

"The courts say it's public policy but no longer constitutional. It would become valid if Roe is overturned," said Koenig, who teaches criminal and constitutional law.

"This statute does not apply to the woman — just the doctors, hospitals and nurses," she said.

From the moment the session opened, Bullard clearly had the votes to report the bill out favorably. But the six-member minority still made its arguments.

"There has been no debate on the rights of the child," said Rep. Nick Ciaramitaro, D-Roseville, legislative spokesman for Right to Life. "Do we protect some people's rights or all people's rights?"

Added Rep. William Van Regenmorter, R-Jenison: "Is a fetus a person? We've avoided the question. And what percentage of (aborted) fetuses are female versus male?"

County shelter offers thoroughbreds, mutts

The Oakland County Animal Shelter wants to remind residents that many thoroughbred dogs — as well as "mutts" — are available through its adopt-a-pet program.

Shepherds, retrievers and other breeds are available, with shots, for \$50, said Carl Anderson, manager of the shelter located on Brown Road in Pontiac, north of Auburn Hills.

Noting that less than 10 percent of stray dogs are ever reunited with their owners, Anderson said thou-

sands of animals that could be lovable pets are destroyed each year.

"Adopting a pet from the shelter enables both the pet and the new owner to win," he said.

The shelter is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays, Wednesday and Friday; from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays; and 9 a.m. to noon on Saturdays.

Additional information is available at 391-4100.

Career planning set at OCC

Oakland Community College will present a free seminar series for career planning and personal development at its four campuses.

The seminars are designed to assist those going through career changes or lifestyle adjustments.

Participants will be able to examine personal, academic and career goals and identify methods of achieving them during the two-hour sessions beginning next week and continuing for six weeks.

While the seminars are free of charge, pre-registration is advisable. The day of the first class, the con-

tact person and source of additional information at the respective campuses are:

• Auburn Hills, Joyce Sachs, 853-4269, from 10 a.m. to noon beginning Thursday.

• Highland Lakes, Nancy Beno, 360-2041, from 8:30 to 8:30 p.m. beginning Monday.

• Orchard Ridge, Nancy Beno, 471-7802, from 10 a.m. to noon beginning Monday.

• Royal Oak/Southfield, Vera Lewis, 552-2524, from 6 to 8 p.m. beginning Wednesday.

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