

Notification is a reasonable step

Measure 43 isn't about abortion rights, it's about parents' rights

There's a lot not to like about Measure 43 on the Nov. 7 ballot: the way abortion activists are using the proposed parental-notification law as a political tool. The fact that it introduces an untested "bypass" provision. That it could push desperate teenage girls into bad decisions.

So why support it? Because Measure 43 would give Oregon parents something it's clear they should have — the opportunity to play a role in a major physical and emotional event in their juvenile daughter's life.

Strip away the politics, and that's what you've got here: the question of whether parents have the right to be involved in such decisions for daughters who are still under their care, for whom they remain legally responsible, who are not yet full grown.

We believe they do.

The measure approaches the issue by requiring doctors to tell parents of girls 15, 16 or 17 of an impending abortion by certified mail. After parents receive the notice, the abortion can proceed. The measure doesn't require parents' approval.

Oregon remains among six states nationally without a law requiring that parents be either notified of or approve of such procedures. Washington and California are two of the others, although California is locked in debate over a similar measure.

Given the intense feelings this issue arouses, some Oregonians undoubtedly will cast a vote down traditional political lines: for abortion rights or against them.

The black-and-white view doesn't do justice to the need to address this, however. And by refusing to hear each other, we also refuse to hear reasonable options.

Reasonable is how the Oregon proposal looks from here. It isn't perfect, but it also isn't just politics. It directly addresses the most compelling issue of parental-notification foes — that girls with good reason not to tell their parents of a pregnancy might be pushed into a bad decision with a law requiring them to do just that.

The initiative allows them to argue their reasons for keeping quiet before a state administrative judge and then leaves it to the judge to decide whether the law applies in their case.

It doesn't lay out how this provision (which would be unique to Oregon) would work, although we suspect girls would connect with a judge through the same organizations they use now to find doctors to perform abortions.

Parental notification laws generally don't reduce abortion rates, studies have shown, but we aren't convinced that should be Oregon's aim in implementing the law anyway. Abortion might be right for some teens, wrong for others.

This isn't about whether abortion is right or wrong. It's not about a "woman's" right to reproductive rights.

It's about parents and their children. If children make a decision about something as big as an abortion, parents ought to know.

We recommend a yes vote on Measure 43.