

Senate endorses parental notification bill

This preliminary vote marks the first time in 24 years that a major abortion bill has been considered by the full Senate.

It marked the first time since abortion was legalized 24 years ago by the U.S. Supreme Court that a major abortion bill has mustered enough support to be brought up for consideration by the full Senate — which for the first time since Reconstruction has a Republican majority.

Only one of the senators voting against the bill is Republican, Sen. Jeff Wentworth of San Antonio.

"I'm fearful, yes, that this does crack the door" to further restrictions, said Sen. Mike Moncrief, D-Fort Worth, who tried unsuccessfully to derail on a procedural motion the bill sponsored by Sen. Florence Shapiro, R-Plano.

Abortion rights advocates predicted the measure would lead to more girls getting illegal abortions, while abortion opponents said it should result in fewer teen pregnancies.

Ms. Shapiro described her measure as a blow for parental rights.

"There is no other provision in Texas law where parents are denied the right to know what is going on in their minor daughters' or sons' lives," she said.

There were 6,346 girls age 11-17 who obtained abortions in Texas in 1995, and a parent was informed of the matter by the minor in 75 percent of the cases, according to senators.

The House has voted once since 1973 on a similar measure providing for parental consent, approving it in 1981. That bill died in the Senate.

Ms. Shapiro's bill would not require parental consent, but only notification of a parent or guardian by the doctor who would perform an abortion on a girl under age 18.

A doctor who didn't follow the notification procedure could be charged

with a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by up to one year in jail and-or a fine of up to \$4,000.

Exceptions would be provided for medical emergencies, and a court procedure would be established for minors who do not want a parent or guardian to be notified.

The appointment of a lawyer or guardian to represent the minor in the court procedure, called a "judicial bypass," would be financed with family planning funds under an amendment to Ms. Shapiro's bill. Moncrief called that ironic.

"To take money out of one area in our government that is providing those services... that teach young people not to make the mistakes that will lead to this kind of predicament doesn't make a great deal of sense to me — especially to give that money to a bunch of lawyers," Moncrief said.

Committee considers school choice measures

Bill would give students access to taxpayer-funded private school tuition

AUSTIN (AP) — Proposals to expand school choice, including one that could give students in low-performing public schools access to taxpayer-funded private school tuition, were considered Wednesday by the Senate Education Committee.

Committee Chairman Teel Bivins, R-Amarillo, is author of the bill to provide students another way out of public schools where less than half the students performed satisfactorily on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills' reading, writing or math section for three straight years.

Students at such campuses make up an estimated 6.5 percent of Texas' 3.7 million public school students.

Bivins' bill would allow them to use state and local education funds to pay private school tuition if they were turned down for a transfer to another public school.

He has said the measure is meant as a pilot program to test the theories of those "who propose that this would substantially increase accountability and student learning, and all the other wonderful claims that are made about vouchers."

Opponents of the tuition voucher program, among other objections, say it's simply wrong to funnel badly needed money from public to pri-

vate schools.

Bivins' voucher measure is based on the existing public education grant program, which allows students who are assigned to attend low-performing campuses to transfer to other school districts that agree to take them.

Eighteen percent of Texas' school children are eligible for the current program, but only 53 students have used the grants to transfer.

The current program applies to students at campuses at which 50 percent or more of the students didn't perform satisfactorily on the statewide Texas Assessment of Academic Skills in any of the preceding three years. That's an easier standard to meet than the three straight years in Bivins' bill for private-school vouchers.

The private-school voucher would be about 80 percent of the money that would go to a public school, or an average of about \$4,000 per student transferring to private school.

Private schools that receive vouchers could not discriminate based on such factors as race, and they would be subject to the same state accountability system as public schools.

Other bills pending in the committee would allow more independent charter schools, publicly funded campuses that are independent of school districts, free from many state regula-

tions and able to enroll students regardless of district lines.

The charter schools are subject to accountability standards, including a requirement for their students to take the TAAS.

The 1995 education overhaul allowed for 20 such schools. The State Board of Education already has awarded all those charters and has been flooded with additional requests.

Under a bill by Bivins, the limit on such schools would be raised from 20 to 100 over the next two years. It would allow 40 more free-standing charter schools in each of the next two years.

A separate bill by Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, would remove the cap entirely, allowing as many charter schools as could make it through the State Board of Education approval process.

"We have had a tremendous number of very well-qualified applicants that have been unable to receive a charter grant because we've limited it to 20. ... I would like to see as many who are qualified be able to receive charters as possible," Nelson said.

The independent charter schools are separate from campus charters, which may be granted by local school boards.

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Application forms should be picked up and returned to Franca Cagle in the Student Publications Manager's office, room 012 Reed McDonald Bldg. Deadline for submitting application: 5 p.m. Thursday, March 20, 1997. Applicants for *The Battalion* editorships will be interviewed during the Student Publications Board Meeting beginning at 4 p.m. Tuesday, March 25, 1997. Applicants for *Aggieland* editor will be interviewed during the Student Publications Board Meeting beginning at 4 p.m. Tuesday, April 1, 1997.

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