

Bill to block state employees' insurance plans from covering abortions clears Assembly

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The Assembly this afternoon OK'd a bill that would prohibit the Group Insurance Board from providing abortions for public employees or contracting to do.

The bill, which cleared the chamber on a 61-35 party-line vote, passed over Dem objections that the legislation was anti-women and would limit access to women's reproductive health care options.

"This is a bill that is about taking away health care that women currently have access to," said Rep. Lisa Subeck, D-Madison. "We don't want to continue down this path of putting politics ahead of women."

But Republicans countered the bill seeks to ensure taxpayers aren't funding abortions for any group of people.

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The bill, authored by Sen. David Craig and Reps. André Jacque, Ron Tusler and Janel Brandtjen, would allow for exceptions for rape, incest and to protect the mother's life. Currently, the state covers "therapeutic abortions" for public employees at any stage of pregnancy. While that definition varies across plans, most are defined by whether they're medically necessary.

The chamber also knocked down two Dem amendments, including one looking to ensure the bill doesn't impact the availability of birth control.

Reps. Chris Taylor, D-Madison, and Deb Kolste, D-Janesville, were among the Dems who spoke in favor of the amendment, saying it was necessary because of the "very

strange” definition of abortion the authors used.

“Don’t use this bill to make inroads into outlawing contraception,” Kolste said.

But Jacque, R-DePere, pushed back, saying the word “contraception” doesn’t appear in the bill, while defending the definition he used.

“To try to pick apart this bill before it becomes statute, to try to make a legal challenge, this is just a distraction,” he said.

The other bill, meanwhile, would have struck out language requiring sexual assault or incest victims who are public employees to report the crime to authorities before they can get an abortion that’s covered by their insurance.

The bill now goes to the Senate.