



## House Democrats Press Office Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT

### Press Clips

Monday, April 10, 2023

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## **CT Mirror**

### *CT legislators OK reproductive health bills, nix parental notification*

**Jenna Carlesso**

Lawmakers have advanced a raft of legislation that would expand access to birth control and maternal health services, while bills that would have required minors to notify their parents before having an abortion did not move forward this session.

The legislature's Public Health Committee declined to vote on three measures mandating that minors notify their parents when seeking an abortion. Democrats campaigned heavily last fall on a promise to preserve access to abortion in Connecticut while services in other states have been rolled back or are under threat.

"In an era when access is being restricted in other places, we're trying to do the opposite," said Rep. Cristin McCarthy Vahey, D-Fairfield, a co-chair of the committee. "We're trying to hold firm to people's ability to receive care and, as appropriate, expand that."

Republicans introduced at least three bills that would have required parental notification for abortions. One of the proposals also would have mandated that minors inform their parents when seeking mental health services or other types of medical care, such as testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, treatment for drug or alcohol addiction and obtaining non-permanent birth control.

Thirty-six states require parental involvement in a minor's decision to have an abortion, according to the Guttmacher Institute.

Anti-abortion advocates, boosted by the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, had hoped to stir more support this year for the notification bills.

"Things take time," Rep. Mark Anderson, R-Granby, who helped author two of the measures, told the CT Mirror in January. "We need the public to get excited about it. ... That's the only way change happens. It takes grassroots organizing."

Proponents said they were disappointed but not surprised by the committee's inaction on the proposals.

"We know it's an uphill battle, particularly in the Public Health Committee, which ... has been heavily filled with people who are on the other side of the sanctity of human life," said Peter Wolfgang, executive director of The Family Institute of Connecticut. "We're on defense. It's going to be a while before we have a proactive victory. We know we're at the beginning of what is going to be a very long haul, in terms of turning around the situation in Connecticut."

Opponents of the legislation have said the requirement would cause harm to minors.

"Many come from families where such an announcement would only exacerbate an already volatile or dysfunctional family situation," officials from the American Civil Liberties Union wrote on their website.

“Unfortunately, there are situations where family members are involved in harming, raping and making somebody pregnant,” said Sen. Saud Anwar, D-South Windsor, a co-chair of the Public Health Committee. “That’s why it’s important to not require that. It may threaten someone’s well-being.”

The committee did pass several bills that would broaden access to birth control and expand services for maternal health.

One measure allows emergency contraception to be sold in vending machines on campuses of higher education institutions. Anyone who wishes to sell contraception in a vending machine but is not a licensed pharmacist must obtain a permit from the Department of Consumer Protection to do so.

Another bill enables pharmacists to prescribe emergency and hormonal contraception to people 16 and older. To qualify, pharmacists must complete a training program on prescribing contraceptives and counsel patients on what to monitor and when to seek medical attention, among other requirements.

The committee also greenlighted a proposal that helps protect health care providers who perform abortions. Under the bill, the state commissioners of public health and consumer protection could not penalize a health care provider whose license was revoked or suspended in another state for performing an abortion. It also prohibits state-licensed health care facilities from revoking a provider’s credentials or privileges based solely on their participation in reproductive health services. The measure does not prevent state officials from taking action against a physician for conduct that otherwise would be subject to discipline under Connecticut’s laws.

And committee members passed a sweeping bill that creates a certification pathway for doulas, licenses free-standing birth centers and directs state agencies to design a program for nurse home visiting to help improve access to services early in an infant’s life.

“We feel it’s very important to continue to gain ground and improve access,” Anwar said. “There is a challenge with maternal health, we can do far better in taking care of women during pregnancy and providing the appropriate level of care.”

On birth control and emergency contraception, he added: “I think there was a clear need for access. We need to recognize that a lot of the women in our state are not connected with any health care system directly or indirectly.”

The measures now head to the House and Senate, where leaders said they are likely to receive bipartisan support. The session runs through June 7.

“Whereas other states are moving [away from] a woman’s right to choose, banning medications and making sure Planned Parenthood goes out of business ... we’re going to continue to be a national leader in letting women and families make decisions about what’s best for them and their bodies,” House Speaker Matthew Ritter said.

*Here are 14 justice-related bills the CT legislature may take up*

**Jaden Edison**

With the legislature’s Judiciary Committee having debated, voted on and advanced numerous bills, lawmakers are one step closer to deciding what gets sent to Gov. Ned Lamont’s desk for his signature.

After being vetted for their constitutionality and consistency with current law, the bills will travel to the House or Senate — whichever chamber they originated in — for further action. Not every bill passed out of committee will see the light of day before the legislature concludes in June. But they indicate at least some of what lawmakers want to address.

So far this year, that has included bail reform, prosecutorial accountability, resources for formerly incarcerated people and routine strip searches in prisons.

Here are some of the key justice-related bills to watch for:

Widely considered a major development among criminal justice experts, House Joint Resolution 261 seeks to amend the state Constitution to allow courts to deny bail to people they consider a risk to safety. Under the current Constitution, courts can deny bail to someone convicted of a capital offense. But because the state repealed the death penalty in 2012, virtually anyone is entitled to bail.

Constitutional amendments must first pass through the House and Senate with three-fourths majority support or a simple majority in both chambers in two successive legislative terms. After passing through the legislature, constitutional amendments then have to garner majority support among voters.

House Bill 6787 would end the prosecution of any ongoing marijuana-related cases if the activity being prosecuted is now decriminalized. It would also require sentencing courts to order a hearing if a person was incarcerated prior to, on or after cannabis legalization in 2021. If “good cause” was shown during that hearing, the court would have to reduce the person’s sentence or release the person, whether fully or under supervision.

The Judiciary Committee’s passage of the bill comes after the chief state’s attorney, Patrick Griffin, told lawmakers in a public hearing last month that his office was still pursuing criminal action against people previously charged for possession of marijuana. Rep. Steven Stafstrom, co-chair of the Judiciary Committee, said he would strike the part of the bill regarding cannabis prosecutions as long as the pending cases are fully cleared in the coming weeks.

The proposed bill maximizes the number of formerly incarcerated people who would qualify for clean slate by adding certain motor vehicle violations to the list of eligible offenses. It would limit clean slate to people who have completed their incarceration, have completed their probation and are not facing pending criminal charges. It would also require the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection to post on its website the list of offenses eligible for erasure.

## Gun control

House Bill 6667, a proposal championed by Lamont, would ban the open carry of firearms and the bulk purchase of handguns, as well as raise the minimum age for purchasing long guns to 21. It also has elements of a proposal from the mayors of Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Waterbury, where 80% of fatal and non-fatal shootings in the state occur, including a provision allowing prosecutors to seek more stringent bail conditions for people who commit serious firearm offenses.

## Identification cards

House Bill 6875 would build on a law passed in 2017 requiring the Department of Correction, which manages the state’s jails and prisons, to provide state ID cards or driver’s licenses to people being released from incarceration.

Under the 2017 law, the department was mandated to provide the IDs to people returning home from prison as long as the person requested the identification, qualified for it and would pay the associated fees. The new bill would eliminate the requirement for a person to make the request, mandate the agency to pay the fees and require department officials to submit an annual report with data on the total number of IDs or licenses issued by each correctional facility.

Republican and Democratic lawmakers sharply criticized the DOC last month after hearing testimony from state residents who said they completed their incarceration without being issued proper identification.

### Juvenile justice

Under House Bill 6888, the state would refer children who commit certain low-level offenses, such as simple trespass, to a juvenile review board that would require the child to undergo prevention, intervention and treatment services provided by a youth service bureau or community-based service providers.

The bill would expand the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee to include people with lived experience in the juvenile justice system. And it would require the Judicial Branch to develop plans for the “full and final” transition of all children in Department of Correction custody to custody of the Judicial Branch.

The judiciary also advanced House Bill 6889, which would restore the “family with service needs” petition process and expand the definition of a family with service needs to include “a truant, or habitual truant, who has been continuously and overtly defiant of school rules and regulations.” The process would allow a family with service needs to seek the help of the court who could then place the child in a community-based program or other service provider. Some advocates oppose this bill because it would result in children having to interact with the judicial system.

### Parole eligibility

Senate Bill 952 would broaden parole eligibility under certain circumstances to include people serving a sentence of more than 10 years for crimes they committed before turning 25 years old, an increase from 18 years old under current law.

### Police interrogation

Senate Bill 1071 would deem a child’s admission, confession or statement to police inadmissible if it was obtained through deceptive or coercive interrogation tactics, such as lying about evidence, making false promises or depriving the person being interrogated of physical or mental health needs.

### Prosecutorial accountability

Senate Bill 1070, supported by the Division of Criminal Justice, would require each of the 13 state’s attorneys to appear annually in front of the Criminal Justice Commission to publicly testify about certain case level data, such as arrests, arraignments and demographics of people being prosecuted.

Randy Cox

The Judiciary Committee advanced two bills tied to the New Haven Police Department incident last summer in which Randy Cox, a Black man, was left paralyzed from the chest down: House Bill 6873 and Senate Bill 1062.

H.B. 6873 would require the state's Police Officer Standards and Training Council to develop a model policy requiring the use of seatbelts for people being transported and establish a disciplinary process for officers who violate the policy, which could include revocation of an officer's license.

Under S.B. 1062, any person who experiences an emergency medical condition or is medically unstable would have the right to receive emergency medical services. It would also require an officer to immediately request medical services for people who communicate they're experiencing an emergency condition or medical instability, or in the event that an officer observes their medical distress.

### Sex offense registry

Senate Bill 1194 would end sex offense registration requirements for people convicted of a sex crime prior to the expansion of the registry, in 1998, and who haven't committed another offense. The people addressed in the legislation were retroactively added to the registry despite being released into the community prior to its expansion. Receiving bipartisan support, lawmakers in the public hearing last month viewed the matter as one of humanity and due process.

### Strip searches

Senate Bill 1196 would mark the first step in the process toward possibly ending routine strip searches in prisons. The proposed bill would require the Department of Correction to submit a proposal to the state for obtaining body scanning machines that would be used to conduct full-body X-ray screenings on incarcerated people.

It would also require DOC Commissioner Angel Quiros to submit to the legislature a report on the estimated costs of implementing the technology, the number of machines required, information concerning potential health risks with the technology and the capability of the technology to replace strip searches.

The legislation that advanced from committee is a drastic change from the earliest version of the bill, which sought to raise the standard for conducting strip searches to "probable cause belief" that a person has contraband and require correctional officers to submit to their supervisor for approval a document outlining the necessity for a search.

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## BAIL REFORM

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The proposal has received bipartisan support but has been opposed by prosecutors, public defenders and the bail industry, who feel there hasn't been enough discussion among stakeholders about any drastic change to the current system.

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## CANNABIS CASES

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## CLEAN SLATE

House Bill 6918 would make technical and clarifying changes to Connecticut's delayed "clean slate" initiative, which automatically erases the criminal records of people seven years after the date of a conviction for a misdemeanor or 10 years after the date of a conviction for certain class D, class E or unclassified felonies if they have not been convicted of other crimes.

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## *SUNDAY FOCUS: The cost of elections*

**Paul Hughes**

HARTFORD – Fourteen days of early voting could add \$2.6 million to costs of running elections locally in Connecticut during the upcoming presidential election year in 2024.

More immediately, early voting is projected to add \$900,000 to the cost of municipal elections in towns and cities that will have elections in November, according to the same legislative estimate.

How much will it really cost?

How to pay for early voting is one item on a long punch list for state lawmakers as they construct an early voting system after state voters overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment to finally allow in-person voting ahead of elections in Connecticut.

There are pending identical House and Senate bills proposing a 14-day early voting period for general elections and primary contests, and a third Senate bill that proposes 10 days of early voting.

There seems some consensus emerging around at least providing state assistance for local elections in November, but beyond that it is foggy. It also remains to be seen if early voting will even be ready to proceed in time for this year's local elections.

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities is asking for state funding to offset the added expenses of early voting to local election administration. Otherwise, the cost will be added to local property taxes. The Connecticut Council of Small Towns is making the same case.

The Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut is also appealing to the legislature and Gov. Ned Lamont to provide state funding for poll workers, ballot printing and coding and other added costs from early voting.

Members of ROVAC brought the subject up directly with Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas and her staff during the group's spring conference Thursday in Southbury. Early voting was one of the topics of discussion.

Thomas has been recommending the state government fully fund early voting to cover the costs of staff time, training materials, ballots and envelopes, chain of custody storage equipment, municipal technological upgrades, and other expenses.

When recently asked if the state should defray the cost of early voting for municipalities, Lamont replied, "Look, probably." But no funding for early voting was included in the two-year, \$50.5 million budget that Lamont recommended to the legislature in February.

Lamont and aides said no funding for early voting was requested when the governor's budget was being prepared, but Lamont also observed the final budget has yet to be negotiated.

“It’s not in our budget, but that’s why we sit down right now with the legislative leaders,” he said.

ONE ARGUMENT FOR STATE FUNDING for at least the upcoming local elections in November is that towns and cities are now developing municipal budget without an established framework for early voting.

The legislature has up to its June 7 adjournment date to enact an early voting bill and approve the next two-year state budget, but by then many municipalities will have adopted their local tax rates and budgets, and the remaining others will be in the process of finalizing their budgets.

“Towns and cities are already doing their budgets, and they can’t have budgeted for this,” said Rep. Matt Blumenthal, D-Stamford, the House chairman of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. “We’re planning to fund it this year, and then after that obviously I would personally love for the state to fund it. I would make my job easier, but I am not on the Appropriations Committee.”

The Democrat-controlled Appropriations Committee is preparing to propose its two-year spending plan later this month and funding for early voting for both municipalities and the secretary of the state’s office are part of the Democratic majority’s discussions.

“We haven’t landed on a number yet,” said Sen. Catherine A. Osten, D-Sprague, the Senate chairwoman, “and we are also not sure they’re going to be able to roll it out for this coming year. So, we’re not positive that they have the resources available to roll it out this year. We’re staying in touch with the secretary of the state to see where we are with that. Until we hear they are ready to roll it out this year, we don’t see funding as an issue for this coming year.”

Sen. Eric C. Berthel, R-Watertown, the ranking Senate member, is open to the state helping towns and cities with elections this November defray the costs of early voting, but he would hold off committing ongoing state funding to future election cycles.

Berthel said the experience in the municipal elections could inform decisions for the 2024 election cycle and beyond, and, despite the next legislative session’s early February start, the legislature would have time to take more action in time for the presidential primaries.

Currently, the 2024 presidential primaries are set for next April 30, but the state Democratic and Republican Parties are backing bipartisan legislation that move the date to April 2.

Towns and cities should not have to bear the added costs of early voting, said Rep. Gale L. Mastrofrancesco, R-Wolcott, the ranking House member of the Government Administration and Elections Committee.

“If they’re going to force the towns to do this, then I think there should be funding because it is only going to be brought down on the taxpayers. The taxpayers at the end of the day are going to obviously end up footing the bill,” she said.

Whatever disagreements Democrats and Republicans continue to have over the details, there is uniform agreement that an early voting law will be added to the statute books.

“It is going to happen,” Lamont said. “It is the right thing to do. We want people to have a stake in the election. We want to make it easier for people to vote. We found out in the last three years that people like that flexibility. We’re going to get it done.”

# New Haven Register

*Charter school debate a growing source of tension in CT legislature: 'They have no argument'*

**Alex Putterman**

In late March, at a meeting of the Education Committee, Sen. Doug McCrory, D-Hartford, delivered what may have been the most rousing defense of charter schools ever heard in Connecticut's legislature.

McCrory, a Hartford Democrat, spoke for 31 uninterrupted minutes, quoting Martin Luther King Jr., invoking civil rights touchstones such as the killing of George Floyd and arguing that poor families in Connecticut cities need school choice for a shot at a good education.

"It is time to give our parents a choice and give our students a chance," he concluded, drawing applause from some in the hearing room, where clapping is strongly discouraged.

When McCrory was done, however, not everyone was convinced. The proposal at hand, designed to facilitate the approval of more charter schools statewide, drew support from all but one Republican on the Education Committee but left Democrats split nearly down the middle: 15 in support, 13 against.

"We have a lot of schools that already have a lot of shortages and do not have supports that they need," state Rep. Maryam Khan, D-Windsor, one of the Democrats who voted against the proposal, said this week. "What's more important is to start funding our neighborhood schools that have remained under-funded."

Always a divisive subject in education circles, charter schools have emerged as a subject of tension during the current legislative session, mostly in relation to Senate Bill 1096, which would reverse a 2015 change requiring the legislature to approve funding for new charter schools, but also in the context of a separate proposal to reshape how public schools are funded.

Proponents of charter schools say they give families, particularly Black and Latino ones, an alternative to under-funded neighborhood schools in poor cities. Opponents argue that instead of funding new, privately run schools for a handful of students, the state should bolster traditional public schools for all students.

The charter school debate has led to public sniping at the Capitol, and with both legislative proposals having advanced out of the Education Committee, the issue is likely to emerge again in the coming weeks.

The night before the committee was set to vote on SB 1096, Connecticut's two largest teachers unions emailed lawmakers urging them to oppose the bill, while noting that one of the groups, the Connecticut Education Association, would consider the upcoming vote as part of its legislative scorecard.

The letter rankled some members of the committee, including McCrory, who said moments before the vote that the unions' position "has placed a bulls-eye on each and every one of our backs," as well as fellow co-chair, Rep. Jeff Currey, D-East Hartford, who accused CEA and AFT of "veiled threats."

Kate Dias, the CEA's president, said she was surprised McCrory and Currey had read the email that way and that the group did not intend it how legislators seemed to have taken it.

"I did not appreciate some of the sentiment that we are putting bulls-eyes on people," Dias said. "That's a really gross misrepresentation of how we were approaching this."

More charter schools?

Under a 2015 law, opening a new charter school in Connecticut requires two tiers of approval: one from the state Board of Education and one from the legislature, which must grant the school's funding. SB 1096 would remove the second tier of approval, meaning the Board of Education alone would be able to authorize charter programs.

This would likely result in the creation of at least several new charter schools, including in Danbury and Norwalk, where proposals approved by the board have stalled in the legislature.

Proponents of the bill say green-lighting those schools, and others like them, would mean more options for families in those cities.

"They're a choice for families that have a limited amount of choice," said Ruben Felipe, a former Bridgeport official who is now executive director of the Connecticut Charter Schools Association. "And they have a proven track record of educating particularly Black and brown and low-income students at an incredibly high level."

Charter school opponents, meanwhile, offer several counter-arguments. For one thing, research into the benefits of charter schools is mixed, with several studies finding little difference in student performance at charter schools vs. traditional public after accounting for the fact charters often attract higher performing students.

For another, they note that charter schools, which receive public funding but operate independently, run by private companies instead of local boards of education, lack the sort of democratic accountability that traditional public schools have.

Finally, they argue that charters draw funding from other schools, leaving behind the remaining students. Though public school districts do not directly fund charter schools, they are responsible for certain costs, including transportation and special education.

"Charter schools pull away resources from the public school districts — in many cases public school districts that are already inadequately funded by the state or by the local government," said Robert Cotto Jr., a Trinity College researcher who studies education policy. "When you make these choices you have to think about what are the consequences for the whole district, for other children that may not have the advantages that the kids that leave do."

Both the CEA and AFT Connecticut oppose SB 1096, arguing that the state should focus on supporting traditional public schools. Dias said she isn't against charter schools in principle but believes they should have significant oversight.

"We understand the function of charters, but only 2 percent of students sit in charters, and there's an extraordinary amount of discussion about how to get them more as opposed to how to support the 98 percent that are in [traditional] public schools," she said.

AFT Connecticut leaders declined to be interviewed for this story but said in a statement they're focused on securing higher staffing levels and more funding for public schools. while "keep[ing] the existing process for approving and funding new charters."

"As educators, we want every child — no matter their language, zip code, background or ability — to receive a high-quality education and the resources they need for the best start in life," AFT Connecticut president Jan Hochadel, also a state senator, said. "Right now our public schools are severely underfunded and understaffed."

In an interview this week, McCrory expressed little patience for people who oppose charter schools, suggesting many legislators voted against SB 1096 primarily out of deference to the unions.

As for the idea that charter schools leave behind students in traditional public schools, McCrory asked why the same argument doesn't apply to magnet schools and said it's because "magnet schools give white people choice."

"They have no argument," McCrory said. "Either you want to give people choice or you don't. That's what it comes down to."

Khan, herself a public school teacher in Hartford, rejected the idea that she and other representatives had voted against the charter school proposal only to appease the unions. In reality, she said, she voted that way because she doesn't think the state needs more schools at a time of declining student populations and because she'd first like to see more funding for traditional public schools.

"Many of us that were not for this bill were not for it before the email [from the unions] came out," Khan said. "We just really wanted to make sure our traditional public schools and neighborhood schools are fully funded before we decide to open additional schools."

#### A funding debate

The debate over charter schools has spilled over to another piece of legislation, House Bill 5003, which would boost funding for districts across Connecticut and reduce disparities between wealthy and poor school systems — but would do so in part by boosting funding for charter programs.

Specifically, the proposal would allot extra money to charter schools (and other schools of choice) with high-need students, using the same formula currently applied to traditional public schools. Felipe says this would have a "huge impact, a really significant impact" on charter schools, which would see sharp funding increases.

Proponents see this as fair: The money follows the students, wherever they happen to be.

"There are students that go to those schools, and those students should not be penalized because of the politics of the situation and whether someone agrees with the school type," said Michael Morton, a deputy executive director of the nonprofit School + State Finance Project, which has pushed the bill. "At some point we do need to have adults in the room and understand that this is about students, not about whatever school type you prefer."

Opponents, however, argue that every dollar that goes toward charter schools could instead go toward traditional schools. More funding for charter schools, they say, only facilitates further privatization.

Joseph Sokolovic, a member of the Bridgeport Board of Education, has roundly criticized HB 5003 on social media, noting that it wouldn't boost Bridgeport as substantially as it would other Connecticut cities and that a disproportionate amount of the new funds in the bill will go toward charter schools.

"When you spend more money on a charter school, you spend less money on a traditional public school," Sokolovic said in an interview. "And by diluting our public school dollars, people get fed up with our public schools because we can't afford the services, thereby feeding the charter schools more."

Cotto, who formerly served on Hartford's Board of Education, said he thinks the proposal benefits charter schools disproportionately.

"Why is the state and the legislature moving fast with making and funding more charter schools instead of saying let's fund and improve our current public schools where they are now?" he said.

Unlike the bill regarding the charter school approval process, HB 5003 faced relatively little pushback in the Education Committee, passing with unanimous bipartisan support. Though Gov. Ned Lamont did not include funding for the bill in his budget proposal in February, proponents hope he'll eventually support some version of it as the budget process progresses.

For some legislators, the charter school component may be a reason to pause before supporting the bill. For McCrory, who said he has opposed similar proposals in the past, it was a plus. He said he voted to advance the bill specifically because it includes support "for all public schools."

#### Moving forward

Cotto and Felipe are on opposite sides of the charter school debate but agree on one thing: Charters seem to have momentum in Connecticut, in a way they didn't in the recent past.

"It seems like a shift," Cotto said. "The legislature is saying we're going to put more money in charter schools, we're going to reduce the rules about how do we approve and fund new charter schools, and then you see which charter schools are going to be put up for approval and it starts to raise alarms."

Felipe said he has seen legislators become more receptive to charter schools and that he's "cautiously optimistic" that a version of SB 1096 will pass this session.

For now, the bill is headed to the Appropriations Committee. If it gains approval there, it will come under the consideration of the broader legislature, where it will surely face both substantial support and substantial pushback.

McCrory said the bill will likely be the subject of negotiation but that he think it will ultimately pass. Dias, from CEA, said she couldn't predict what would happen but that "the conversation is still going on."

"Our position on that bill has not changed," she said.

### *Lamont: Ruling on abortion drug 'devastating attack' on reproductive rights*

#### **Staff and Wire Reports**

HARTFORD — After competing judges rulings Friday night cast the future of mifepristone, a widely used abortion drug, into uncertainty, Gov. Ned Lamont said an order by a federal judge that could curtail access to the drug is "yet another devastating attack on reproductive rights."

"Pills such as mifepristone allow you to decide when you want to start a family, not the government," the governor said in a statement issued by his office.

Access to the drug appeared to be open Friday night after court rulings by two separate judges in Texas and Washington that came just minutes apart.

U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, a Trump appointee, ordered a hold on federal approval of mifepristone in a decision that overruled decades of scientific approval. But that decision came at nearly same time that U.S. District Judge Thomas O. Rice, an Obama appointee, essentially ordered the opposite and directed U.S. authorities not to make any changes that would restrict access to the drug in at least 17 states where Democrats sued in an effort to protect availability.

Kacsmaryk's ruling was made in a lawsuit filed by the Alliance Defending Freedom, the same group involved in the Mississippi case that overturned *Roe v. Wade*. The suit sought to suspend or overturn the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval of the drug in 2000. Instead, Kacsmaryk issued an injunction directing the FDA to stay mifepristone's approval while a lawsuit challenging the safety and approval of the drug continues. His 67-page order gave the government seven days to appeal.

"This case is not about safety. This is about controlling medical decisions that should be between patients and their doctors," Lamont said in his statement Friday night. "We will not let this decision derail our fight to defend and strengthen abortion rights."

"In Connecticut, we remain committed to expanding access to reproductive health care, including allowing pharmacists to prescribe birth control and protecting both patients and providers who seek and offer that care," the governor said.

Amanda Skinner, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, said in a statement Saturday that the Texas judge's ruling could "severely undermine access to abortion in Connecticut."

"While access remains protected for now, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England will continue to do everything possible to provide patients with timely abortion care, including the method that is best for their circumstances," Skinner said.

U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy called the Texas judge's ruling the "latest effort in the right's coordinated campaign to strip away women's rights."

"We cannot allow right-wing judges to ignore the science, and put the health, safety, and autonomy of millions of women at risk," Murphy said in a statement Saturday.

Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz added in a statement Saturday that these "dangerous and all-out attacks" on the right to abortion access "must end."

"One anti-choice judge's opinion should not overturn decades of scientific research," Bysiewicz said. "To those across the country in anti-choice states, know that Connecticut is a safe harbor, and we welcome you."

U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-3rd District, said the "ruling goes against science." She noted that half of abortions performed in the country are medical abortions and that nearly all medical abortions rely on access to mifepristone.

"Not only does this decision undermine the integrity of the FDA approval process and threatens access to all-FDA approved drugs, it strips American women of access to a safe and effective health care

option," DeLauro said. "We should be expanding access to health care, not limiting it. We cannot let this stand."

Mifepristone is part of a two-drug regimen that has long been the standard for medication abortion in the U.S. Clinics and doctors that prescribe the combination have said they plan to switch to using only misoprostol. The single-drug approach is slightly less effective at ending pregnancies.

Last year, state lawmakers passed a "safe-harbor" law that meant to block attempts by other states to investigate people who obtain an abortion legally in Connecticut. The law allows people who are sued in so-called "bounty" lawsuits for obtaining an abortion to recover damages and legal fees in Connecticut court, and prevents officials from assisting a lawsuit or criminal prosecution against someone who obtained an abortion in Connecticut.

Connecticut lawmakers codified the right to abortion into law in 1990, decades before the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* last summer that undid federal protection for abortion.

Other Democratic Connecticut lawmakers also blasted the ruling Friday night.

"Once again, we see extreme conservative judges legislate from the bench," state Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff, D-Norwalk, said in a tweet. "Taking women's abortion rights again." He also noted the timing of the decision, which came on a Friday before a holiday weekend.

"This decision is unbelievably lawless, and an egregious abuse of judicial power," state Rep. Matt Blumenthal, D-Stamford, tweeted.

## **WSHU**

### *CT women's Caucus pushes for final passage of 10 bills*

#### **Ebong Udoma**

With most committee work in the Connecticut General Assembly done for the year, members of the bipartisan women's caucus are celebrating 10 of their bills that are being considered for floor votes.

"These bills are the result of the collective conversations that we have had with women in our districts across the state," said state Representative Dorinda Borer of West Haven, the Democratic co-chair of the caucus, which is the largest in the state Legislature with more than 70.

"These bills represent protection for women, improving healthy outcomes for women, supporting education in our state and also supporting women in the workforce," Borer said.

"Some of them have work to be done, and we do that work in a bipartisan way," said state Representative Nicole Klarides-Ditria of Seymour, the Republican co-chair of the caucus.

One of the bills would raise the minimum age for marriage to 18. An earlier version passed in 2017 and became law. But it has an exception that allows 16- and 17-year-olds to marry, with parental consent.

"We need to finish the job and have no exceptions so that minors cannot marry in our state," said Democratic state Representative Christine Conley of Groton.

Additional proposals include equitable public school funding, maternal healthcare, emergency contraception on college campuses and early childhood education. Others deal with the gender wage gap, domestic violence and grief counseling.