

Editorial: No on Prop. 4

Proposition 4 isn't really about parental notification; it's an attack on the right to an abortion.

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The story behind "Sarah's Law" says a lot about it. "Sarah" was, according to Proposition 4 supporters, a 15-year-old girl who died from an abortion gone wrong 14 years ago, a death that might have been prevented had her parents been notified beforehand. Much of that is false. The girl's name wasn't Sarah; she lived in Texas, not California; and though she was 15, she already had a child and was in a common-law marriage, which means she wouldn't have been covered by the law Californians are being asked to consider.

That's how far the Proposition 4 campaign reached to come up with a poster girl. The initiative purports to protect California girls from dangers associated with abortions by requiring that their parents be notified. But Proposition 4 attempts to solve something that isn't much of a problem. There's no evidence that California's teenage girls are harmed by abortions with any frequency, whether or not their parents have been notified. The most recent known case of serious injury that might have been prevented by Proposition 4 occurred in the 1980s.

In fact, under the guise of protecting underage girls, this proposal really is just the latest attempt to impose any obstacle in the exercise of reproductive freedom. This represents the third try in recent years to pass such a measure. California should reject it again.

We sympathize with the concern that caring parents are sometimes left in the dark about a daughter's abortion. It is painful to imagine a child attempting to manage such a crisis without guidance. Still, both sides concede that most parents already know of their children's pregnancies -- 60% of the parents of 15-year-old girls said they were aware.

Proposition 4's writers say they crafted a measure that would permit girls in potentially abusive situations to get an abortion without their parents being notified. To do so, they would need to tell another adult relative. But a girl can use this option only if she makes a written accusation alleging that her parents are repeat child abusers, with the complaint to be turned over to authorities. Spoiler language like this makes it hard to believe that Proposition 4 is chiefly about girls' safety.

The real safety concerns are these: If this measure passes, some girls will seek out illegal abortions rather than notify their parents. Some will attempt to hide the pregnancy, go without prenatal care, give birth alone and abandon the newborn. With no real evidence that this proposal would enhance the welfare of the state's teens -- and with no doubt that it would roll back decades of hard-won constitutional rights -- Proposition 4 deserves defeat.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-ed-4prop25-2008sep25.0,7115780.story>