

Santa Cruz Sentinel

As We See It: Vote no on Prop. 4

Article Launched: 10/10/2008 01:30:56 AM PDT

In 2005, Californians rejected a ballot measure that would have required parental notification before girls under the age of 18 could have an abortion.

In 2006, a similar measure was again rejected by voters.

This year, a new version of the bill, Proposition 4, is back. But just as was the case in 2005 and 2006, voters should reject the measure.

At the heart of the proposition is the belief that parents should be notified before a minor can receive an abortion. On the surface, that sounds perfectly reasonable.

Of course parents should always know about the issues surrounding their children's health and safety. And in most families, that is the case. Parents and children talk to each other and decide what's best.

But most is not all. In some families there is no communication. In some families a girl might fear telling her parents and instead seek unsafe alternatives. Not everyone lives the "Ozzie and Harriet" life.

Proposition 4 tries to get around that by providing alternative notification methods. Instead of telling her parents, a girl could notify another adult family member, such as an aunt or older sister. Sounds good, but such a notification triggers a Child Protective Services abuse investigation against the parents, regardless of the circumstances surrounding the notification.

The measure also allows a minor girl to go to court to seek a waiver from parental notification. Opponents of the measure say it is absurd to expect a teenager -- too scared to talk to her to parents -- to navigate the court system, wait for calendar dates and appear before a judge to plead her case. We agree.

It would be wonderful to live in a world where families talk to each other and every decision is thoughtfully considered. But that's not the real world. Some children have good reason to fear their parents. Proposition 4 puts those teens at risk of violence from their parents and at risk of unsafe abortions.

The decision whether to have an abortion is a difficult choice. Women, regardless of their age, need someone they can turn to for help and guidance. That person may be a boyfriend, mother, minister or counselor. But that person needs to be someone they can trust.

Proposition 4 attempts to force that trust by legislating family communication. But try as we might, we cannot make reasoned, caring discussion happen by passing a law.

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