

California lawmakers revive early abortion provider bill

By Jeremy B. White, Sacramento Bee

More medical professionals, including nurses and midwives, would be permitted to perform certain early abortions in California under a bill unveiled Tuesday.

In a news conference at the Capitol that served to both introduce the bill and mark the 40-year anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark Roe v. Wade decision, lawmakers and women's health advocates said the measure is necessary for women in communities without abortion providers.

They said 52 percent of California counties do not contain a provider, other than hospitals, which often have only limited services.

"California will not go back. We are going to go forward," said Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson, D-Santa Barbara. "And we are doing that by making sure that reproductive health care, that abortion services are available to every woman, to make sure that we all have access, whether we live in rural areas or urban centers, whether or not we are able to afford the procedure or whether we require assistance."

Assembly Bill 154 by Assemblywoman Toni Atkins, D-San Diego, would revive last year's push to expand abortion access by allowing nurse practitioners to perform nonsurgical early abortions.

Gov. Jerry Brown ultimately signed a diluted version of the bill that allowed only non-doctor clinicians trained through a specific pilot program to perform the procedure. The bill extended that program, jointly administered by the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development and UC San

Francisco, until Jan. 1, 2014.

The California Nurses Association opposed the initial version of last year's bill, saying it would be premature to expand beyond a pilot program before researchers at UC San Francisco completed a multiyear study. The organization also had concerns about providing proper training and ensuring that the bill provided for an early first-trimester technique.

That landscape has changed now that UC San Francisco has completed its study and seen the results published in the American Journal of Public Health, Amy Everitt, state director of NARAL Pro-Choice America, said at the rally.

The study concluded that trained nurse practitioners, physician assistants and certified nurse midwives could safely perform early abortions.

The nurses association is pleased that the study has been completed but is still developing its position on the bill, said Bonnie Castillo, government relations director. She said the organization has already held "productive" meetings with the bill's sponsors aimed at clarifying some of the bill's language.

"We anticipate that's going to be achievable, but right now we believe that it's just a process," Castillo said.