

Ohio lawmakers are using their state budget to try to restrict abortion and redefine pregnancy

By [Tara Culp-Ressler](#) on Jun 27, 2013 at 9:00 am



Ohio Gov. John Kasich (R)

Ohio lawmakers are currently trying to pass a state budget, but many of the debates over the legislation have nothing to do with the state's financial policies whatsoever. Abortion opponents have hijacked the budget negotiations to [launch several attacks on women's health](#), tacking on provisions that would defund Planned Parenthood, shut down abortion clinics, and redirect state funding to right-wing "crisis pregnancy centers." And the budget only continues to get worse for Ohio women.

On Tuesday, anti-abortion Republicans in the state added [yet another budget provision](#) related to reproductive health. The new [amendment](#) would require doctors to look for a fetal heartbeat before performing an abortion, presumably with an unnecessary ultrasound procedure, and then "notify the woman about the presence of the heartbeat." Abortion doctors would also be required to tell women about the fetus' likelihood of "surviving to full term."

As the policy group Innovation Ohio [notes](#), this language is borrowed from the controversial "[heartbeat](#)" ban that Ohio Republicans tried to push through last year. That radical legislation would have criminalized abortion after a fetal heartbeat could first be detected — which typically occurs around six weeks, before many women even know they're pregnant. Despite the fact that Republicans ultimately [gave up on that measure](#) at the end of last session, acknowledging it was too controversial to win support even among anti-choice groups, far-right abortion opponents vowed to [keep trying](#).

They've found their chance with [this budget amendment](#), which actually seeks to redefine the medical terms of pregnancy under Ohio law. The new provision defines a fetus as "human offspring developing during pregnancy from the moment of conception and includes the embryonic stage of development" and ultimately declares that pregnancy begins at fertilization. The commonly accepted scientific definition of pregnancy, however, is the point at which a fertilized egg becomes implanted in the uterine lining.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, changing those scientific definitions [goes against decades of precedent in federal law](#) — and could ultimately impact some forms of contraception, like the morning after pill. Emergency contraception is [not actually an abortion](#) because it doesn't prevent implementation and has no effect on women who are already pregnant. But Ohio's state law may soon define it that way anyway.

Ohio's budget bill passed out of committee on Tuesday night, and now heads to full votes in the House and Senate on Thursday. Both chambers are expected to approve it. At this point, Gov. John Kasich (R) is the only lawmaker who will be able to edit the budget bill — and, if he chooses, remove some of the abortion-related provisions. But so far, he hasn't indicated that he's willing to make any changes once the legislation lands on his desk.

"I think the legislature has a right to stick things in budgets and put policy in budgets... There's nothing out of the ordinary here in the way in which they've decided this," Kasich [said on Wednesday](#) when asked about the fetal heartbeat provision. He said he would make a decision about the bill when it gets closer to the July 1 deadline for its passage. "I'll look at the language, keeping in mind that I'm pro-life," the governor added.

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