Abortion bill writers need unity, Guste says

Capitol news bureau

Lawmakers wanting to suppress abortion ought to get together and file a bill that would pass constitutional muster, Attorney General William Guste said Wednesday.

"I just think it would make for a more orderly process if all of those who intend to file bills to in some way suppress abortion would get together and file a bill that would pass constitutional muster," said Guste.

"Procedurally, I think it's a better way of going about it," he said at a news conference.

Guste's comments were in response to legislation filed by Sen. Mike Cross, D-Baker. Cross' anti-abortion bill would provide no exceptions, including rape or incest or consideration for the life of the mother, the most commonly discussed exemptions.

Although touting the need for a unified approach, Guste said, "I'm not prepared right now to give you the A, B, Cs and Ds of such a bill (that would meet constitutional standards)."

The attorney general also said he prefers a bill that would not carry any criminal penalties with it, "certainly no criminal penalties on the part of the mother."

He also would not attach a criminal penalty to any actions by a physician. The physician's ability to continue practicing could be placed in jeopardy, however.

"I intend to get together with all those intending to file legislation," he said.

In describing his legislation, Cross said he believes the issue "is not one you take a poll on and see how the majority feels and vote that way. It's more of a principle or a conviction that you have. You either believe in abortions or you don't."

His proposal mirrors a 1975 Louisiana law that was struck down by federal courts. Performing an abortion would be punishable by up to 16 years in prison. Killing a child during delivery would be punishable by life imprisonment.

Although the bill provides exceptions for saving the mother's life during birth, there are no exceptions for abortion, including rape or incest.

Gov. Buddy Roemer has said he would veto an anti-abortion bill that does not contain exceptions for the health of the mother or rape and incest.

Cross' bill is the first dealing with abortion to be filed for the legislative session beginning April 16. He said he did not consult with any other legislators in writing the measure.