Rape, incest in abortion bill

By DOUG MYERS
Capitol news bureau

Three state lawmakers who supported anti-abortion legislation without rape and incest exceptions last year announced plans Wednesday to introduce a bill in the 1991 Legislature with those two exceptions.

However, the lead sponsors of the "pro-life" bill — state Rep. Sam Theriot, D-Abbeville, and state Sens. Allen Bares, D-Lafayette, and John Saunders, D-Ville Platte — said at a news conference Wednesday that they expect other legislators to file bills with no exceptions except for saving the life of the mother.

"This is not a perfect bill, but this is the best we're going to get in 1991," Theriot said.

The proposed law would prohibit abortion except in cases where the life and health of the mother and the unborn child are in jeopardy. Abortions would be permitted within 13 weeks of pregnancy.

In a case of rape, the victim would have to seek medical assistance within five days or "when physically possible." She also would have to report the crime within seven days or, if she was incapacitated, within seven days "from the time she becomes able to report it to law enforcement officials," Bares said.

In a case of incest, the victim would have to report the crime within 13 weeks and could have an abortion any time within the same 13 weeks, he said.

"We believe this bill will shut the door on 99 percent of abortions — if not all abortions — performed in the state of Louisiana," said Sharon Fontenot, statewide coordinator for the Right-to-Life Organization.

There was no immediate reaction from abortion rights advocates about the proposal.

Abortion

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Last year, state Rep. Louis "Woody" Jenkins, D-Baton Rouge, sponsored a bill without rape and incest exceptions that was passed in the Legislature, but was vetoed by Gov. Buddy Roemer.

Roemer also vetoed a second bill, offered by Saunders, that included rape and incest exceptions.

Theriot, Bares and Saunders supported both bills.

"This year, we will have a bill the governor will have no problem in signing because of the way it was drawn up," Saunders said.

"We all realize this is a departure from the bills offered and supported by many of us in 1990," Bares said.

But, Bares said, the three key sponsors believe the bill "represents the feelings of the vast majority of people in Louisiana, and if passed and held constitutional," the state will make "giant strides toward preventing the continuous destructions of the thousands of human lives in our state."

Bares said Roemer has been given a draft of the bill, but Roemer said Wednesday he has not had a chance to review it.

The governor has said the bill must have rape and incest exceptions before he will consider signing it into law.

Fontenot praised Theriot, Bares and Saunders for promising to introduce the legislation.

"We support this bill," Fontenot said.

"We are very, very proud of the legislators who are prepared to introduce this bill on our behalf, and we ask the legislators of Louisiana to vote affirmatively."

Meanwhile, the Louisiana Chapter of Human Life International on Wednesday issued a statement that urged "pro-lifers" to unify for the passage of an "uncompromising anti-abortion bill that would protect the lives of all of Louisiana's pre-born children."