

ABORTION

Senators set 12-week limit

Senators have voted in favour of allowing an abortion to happen up to 12 weeks into a pregnancy while retaining penalties for later terminations, a move that pro-choice activists said fell short of protecting the rights of women.

In a late night session of the Senate on Monday, legislators voted 166-7 in favour of amending a law that criminalises abortion, backing a plan that seeks to tackle unregulated terminations by non-medical practitioners. Under the amendment, an abortion after 12 weeks would be allowed only under certain conditions and would otherwise be punishable by up to six months in prison, or a fine of up to 10,000 baht, or both.

"This means abortion is conditional and can only be done by doctors according to the law," Senator Wanlop Tangkhananurak said.

The amendment was passed by the

Lower House last week and follows a Constitutional Court decision last February that ruled that criminalising abortion was unconstitutional and violated human rights. Under the new criteria, a termination after 12 weeks would be allowed if a certified doctor deems there is a high risk of foetal impairment, danger to the life of the mother, or if a pregnancy was the result of rape, deception or coercion. But pro-choice activists said retaining penalties would maintain the stigma of abortion.

"We want all penalties to be revoked because it is a person's right to abort a pregnancy without being punished," Nisarath Jongwisan, councillor and activist at Tam Tang, a pro-choice group, said.

"The penalties will impede a person's access to safe services and also tarnish the dignity of those women," she said. REUTERS