

'They're not merchandise': Louisiana Legislature advances bill outlawing payments for aborted fetuses' organs

BY Elizabeth Crisp

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Louisiana lawmakers are one step away from approving legislation that would make it a crime — punishable by up to 50 years in prison — to accept any payment to harvest, sell or transport the organs of aborted fetuses.

The legislation is a direct response to last year's uproar [over a series of covert videos](#) that made the rounds on conservative and anti-abortion websites and claimed Planned Parenthood was illegally profiting off of selling body parts of aborted fetuses. Planned Parenthood has denied the claims and said the videos depicted discussions of reimbursements for legal, not-for-profit collections of fetal tissue for medical research. [Multiple state investigations](#) have so far found no evidence of wrongdoing — [including at Louisiana's abortion](#) clinics, which are not operated by Planned Parenthood.

But state Sen. Ryan Gatti, R-Bossier City, said he thinks [Senate Bill 33](#) will clear up a “gray area” in the law and make it so that no money exchanges hands for the tissues and organs of intentionally aborted fetuses — even in the research arrangements that Planned Parenthood claimed it used.

“They're not merchandise to be sold,” Gatti said.

Gatti's bill has faced no opposition to date as his measure has moved through the State Capitol. It sailed out of the House Health & Welfare Committee Tuesday morning with little discussion and now heads to the House floor for final approval. It will go to Gov. John Bel Edwards if no amendments are added in the last step.

Gatti's bill includes language that would outlaw the storage and handling fees, transportation reimbursements and other repayments that Planned Parenthood claimed were legal steps in the not-for-profit process of collecting fetuses for medical research.

Gatti said he carefully studied the anti-abortion Center for Medical Progress' sting

videos to learn the terminology used by abortion providers so that his bill could not be side-stepped if it becomes law. It's already illegal to sell human remains in Louisiana.

"I wanted to make sure we cover all the bases on this," he said.

Gatti's bill would not apply to donations of fetal body parts that are used for stem cell research and umbilical cord blood.

Other anti-abortion legislation in Louisiana frequently targets licensing or creates avenues for civil liabilities, but Gatti said he specifically wanted his bill to create a new crime.

"We can determine in this state what's a crime and what's not," he said.

Those found in violation of the proposed law would face at least 10 years in prison without the possibility of parole. The maximum sentence would be 50 years and a fine of up to \$50,000.

After the Center for Medical Progress released the undercover videos of [discussions](#) with Planned Parenthood leaders last year, the nation's largest abortion [provider](#) [changed](#) its policy of accepting reimbursements for fetal tissue donations.

Planned Parenthood has faced no charges related to the videos, but [two of the anti-abortion activists](#) behind the purported sting — David Daleiden and Sandra Merritt — are facing [a lawsuit from Planned Parenthood](#) and criminal charges in Texas.

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