

Pray: Arkansas Sued Over Ban on Abortions After 12 Weeks Pregnancy

Groups supporting the right to abortion filed suit on Tuesday challenging an Arkansas law that would ban most **abortions** after 12 weeks, seeking to block one of the nation's most restrictive abortion measures before it takes effect in July.

The Republican-controlled Arkansas legislature overrode Democratic Governor Mike Beebe's veto of the controversial measure in March. At the time, it was the most restrictive state abortion law in the nation.

Since then North Dakota lawmakers passed a law banning abortion as early as six weeks.

The Arkansas Human Heartbeat Protection Act would ban most abortions at about 12 weeks of pregnancy, once a fetal heartbeat can be detected by a standard ultrasound.

It includes exemptions for rape, incest, the life of the mother and major fetal conditions. Doctors who violate the law risk having their licenses revoked by the state Medical Board.

Eleven states including Arkansas already ban abortions at 20 weeks or later, according to Kate Bernyk, spokesman for The Center for Reproductive Rights.

Eight states enforce the bans: Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Kansas, Indiana, Alabama, Nebraska and North Carolina. Similar measures in Arizona, Georgia and Idaho have been blocked by the courts.

The Arkansas lawsuit, filed in federal court on Tuesday by the Center for Reproductive Rights, the national American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU's Arkansas chapter, asked for a

temporary injunction against the law. It was filed on behalf of two Arkansas doctors who perform abortions.

“It’s a clear violation of U.S. Court rulings, dating back 40 years,” said Rita Sklar, director of the ACLU of Arkansas.

Aaron Sadler, spokesman for Arkansas Attorney General Dustin McDaniel, said the state had been expecting the lawsuit.

“It is our responsibility to defend state law, and we will do so in this litigation,” Sadler said.

Planned Parenthood, which is the nation’s largest abortion provider and operates clinics in Arkansas, fought the measure.

“This restrictive ban on safe and legal abortion puts the health and safety of Arkansas women and their families at risk,” said Jill June, chief executive of Planned Parenthood of the Heartland. “A woman may need an abortion for many different reasons, and she should be trusted to make her own personal private medical decisions.”

Jerry Cox, president of Family Council of Arkansas, which opposes abortion, said he thinks the courts will allow the Arkansas measure to stand.

“If the state of Arkansas ends up spending public funds to defend a law that protects human life, that’s an excellent use of our public dollars.”

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