

Abortion Clinic Protesters Getting Day in Supreme Court

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday agreed to consider a challenge to a Massachusetts law that ensures access for patients at clinics that offer abortions.

Anti-abortion protesters challenged the law, saying it violated their constitutional rights, including their right to freedom of speech, by preventing them from standing on the sidewalk and speaking to those entering clinics.

The case concerns a 2007 law that amended an existing statute that restricted conduct outside abortion clinics by introducing a blanket 35-yard (32-meter) no-entry zone that only allowed patients, staff, passers-by and emergency services to enter.

The protesters say the exemption makes the law unconstitutional under the free speech guarantees of the First Amendment because the government is choosing one set of beliefs over another.

Lawyers for the state of Massachusetts dismissed that claim, saying the law was enacted purely to deal with a potential public safety problem.

Oral arguments and a ruling are expected in the court's next term, which begins in October and ends in June 2014.

The case is *McCullen v. Coakley*, U.S. Supreme Court, No. 12-1168.