

Arizona Battles Planned Parenthood Over Abortion Drugs

Arizona regulations that would limit the use of the most popular **abortion-inducing drug** risk harming women seeking to end their pregnancies, attorneys for a women's health provider argued in federal court in Tucson on Wednesday.

The controversial regulations would require any medicine used to induce an abortion to be administered strictly according to protocols issued by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and subject to instructions on the label.

The Arizona rules, which would go into effect on April 1, relate to the drug RU-486, also known as Mifepristone. The FDA in 2000 approved it for use within seven weeks of a pregnancy, but doctors in many parts of the country have begun using a new protocol that simplifies the use of the drug for women.

They prescribe the drug "off-label," administering it to women in later stages of pregnancy and allowing some to take a second part of the treatment at home.

Four states have attempted to limit off-label use. Federal courts have upheld similar laws in Ohio and Texas, but state courts in Oklahoma and North Dakota have rejected such measures, according to Planned Parenthood Arizona.

Planned Parenthood and a private clinic have sued the state over the proposed rules and are seeking an injunction before they go into effect.

U.S. District Judge David C. Bury at a court hearing in Tucson heard arguments from both sides over the rules, which were introduced by Arizona officials in January as part of a 2012

abortion-related law.

“The law is unconstitutionally vague,” Alice Clapman, an attorney with Planned Parenthood, told the court.

The rules could “keep some women from obtaining an abortion all together,” she argued.

The groups suing to challenge the rules argue new protocols used in many parts of the country at physicians’ discretion are simpler and less expensive, but offer equal treatment and have been used safely for more than 700,000 women.

A return to the FDA’s protocol requires a second visit to the **abortion** provider, creating an undue burden for women, especially in northern Arizona where they may have to travel hundreds of miles to receive a surgical abortion, the groups challenging the rules argue.

Michael Tyron, an attorney for the state, countered that the law “doesn’t ban abortions, it regulates them.”

“At most, these are inconveniences,” he said in court. “We all go through inconveniences, but this law doesn’t burden women.”

Bury did not immediately rule on the request to block the rules from taking effect next week.

“It’s interesting to note that the abortion industry has not petitioned the Food and Drug administration to change its protocol,” said Cathi Herrod, president of the conservative lobbying group Center for Arizona Policy. “If Planned Parenthood’s protocol is so wonderful, then why haven’t they asked the FDA to change it?”

Editing by Alex Dobuzinskis

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