

Federal Judge Temporarily Blocks North Dakota Abortion Law

A federal judge on Monday temporarily blocked North Dakota's new abortion law, which bans procedures to end pregnancy once a fetal heartbeat can be detected, as early as six weeks.

The law, the most restrictive in the country, was to go into effect August 1. U.S. District Court Judge Daniel Hovland granted a preliminary injunction blocking it in response to a lawsuit filed by Red River Women's Clinic, the only abortion clinic in the state.

The clinic said banning abortions that early, before many women even knew they were pregnant, would bar nearly 90 percent of the abortions it performs.

The clinic argued that the law violates the U.S. Constitution and places the health of women in danger.

"The court finds the plaintiffs have established that they and their patients will be subjected to the threat of irreparable injury in the absence of a preliminary injunction," the judge wrote in his ruling.

If the clinic closes or is forced to stop performing abortions, the closest alternatives are about 250 miles away in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, and Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Governor Jack Dalrymple, a Republican in a state with a Republican-controlled legislature, said in March that it was not clear if the law would be constitutional but that money should be provided by the state to defend it.

The law, approved in March, is among a host of restrictions on

abortion passed by Republican-led state legislatures this year. A dozen states have approved bans on most abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy, but none have approved restrictions as strong as the ones enacted by North Dakota and Arkansas.

In March, Arkansas banned most abortions after 12 weeks of pregnancy. A federal judge blocked the law in May, at least temporarily.

Reporting By Brendan O'Brien; Editing by Dina Kyriakidou and John Wallace

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