

Wisconsin Abortion Law Sends Planned Parenthood Packing, but Judge Intervenes

A federal judge on Monday temporarily blocked a portion of a newly enacted law in Wisconsin that opponents say would effectively shut down two of the four abortion clinics in the state if enforced.

The measure, signed into law on Friday by Republican Gov. Scott Walker, requires women to undergo an ultrasound before they get an **abortion** and doctors who perform the procedure to have admitting privileges at a hospital located within 30 miles of their practice.

U.S. District Judge William Conley ordered that the admitting-privileges requirement be suspended for 10 days, until another hearing on the matter can be held.

Conley wrote in his decision that if the law were enforced, there would “almost certainly be irreparable harm to those women who will be foreclosed from having an abortion in the next week either because of the undue burden of travel or the late stage of pregnancy, as well as facing increasing health risks caused by delay.”

Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin and Affiliated Medical Services, the state’s two abortion providers, challenged the restrictions in a lawsuit filed on Friday.

They argued that the measure, passed last week by Wisconsin’s Republican-led Assembly, would force the closure of abortion clinics in Appleton and Milwaukee because doctors at those two facilities do not have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital.

Two other clinics, one elsewhere in Milwaukee and one in Madison, would not be affected.

"We are not surprised, but we are absolutely confident that this law will be upheld," Susan Armacost, legislative director of Wisconsin Right to Life, said of the judge's ruling.

Conley did not block the portion of the law requiring an ultrasound to be performed on a pregnant woman at least 24 hours before an abortion, a requirement that can be waived if the pregnancy is the result of sexual assault or incest.

Under the law, results of the ultrasound, including images, a description of the fetus and a visualization of the fetal heartbeat, must be offered to the patient, but she can decline to see them.

Anti-abortion activists, frustrated at having failed in efforts to roll back the landmark 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that established a woman's constitutional right to terminate her pregnancy, have recently turned to enacting new abortion limits at the state level.

During the past couple of weeks, a Texas House committee and the North Carolina Senate both approved new abortion restrictions. Texas Democrat Wendy Davis made headlines last month by stalling a Republican-backed measure with a filibuster.

The latest Wisconsin legal skirmish follows similar lawsuits in Mississippi and Alabama, where courts have likewise blocked statutes requiring admitting privileges for physicians to perform abortions, according to data published July 1 by the Guttmacher Institute, a nonprofit organization that supports abortion rights.

Five other states have admitting-privilege laws on the books, according to the data.

Reporting By Brendan O'Brien; Editing by Steve Gorman and Philip Barbara

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