

Justices reject Arizona bid over abortion drugs (Update)

15 December 2014, by Astrid Galvan

The Supreme Court is refusing to allow Arizona to enforce stringent restrictions on drug-induced abortions while a challenge to those rules plays out in lower courts.

The justices on Monday left in place a lower court ruling that blocked regulations that control where and how women can take medications that cause abortions. The rules also would prohibit use of the drugs after the seventh week of pregnancy instead of the ninth.

Stephanie Grisham, spokeswoman for Arizona Attorney General Tom Horne, said it would have been extremely rare for the high court to grant the state's request to enforce the restrictions.

"We're disappointed, of course, but at this point there is nothing more that we can do," Grisham said.

Planned Parenthood is among the abortion providers challenging the rules in federal court.

"The court did the right thing today, but this dangerous and misguided law should never have passed in the first place," Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, said in a statement.

The San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in April issued an injunction blocking the rules while the case against them plays out in federal court in Tucson. A federal judge initially denied Planned Parenthood's request for an injunction. The appeals court overturned his ruling.

Planned Parenthood Arizona has said about 800 women would have had to get surgical abortions in 2012 if the rules were in effect then.

The state Legislature approved the restrictions in 2012. Arizona argues they protect women's health by mandating a federally approved protocol.

Similar laws are in effect in North Dakota, Ohio and Texas. The Oklahoma Supreme Court struck down the restrictions in that state.

The rules ban women from taking the most common abortion-inducing drug, mifepristone, after the seventh week of pregnancy.

In 2000, the Food and Drug Administration approved the medication's use through the first seven weeks of pregnancy. Mifepristone is prescribed with a second drug, misoprostol.

Since the FDA approval, medical researchers and clinical trials have shown mifepristone is effective in much smaller doses and for two weeks longer in a pregnancy, the challengers said. The second drug may be taken at home.

Arizona's rules would require the drugs be taken only at the FDA-approved doses and only at clinics.

Planned Parenthood says medication-induced abortions account for more than 40 percent of abortions at its clinics.

To justify the restrictions, Arizona and the other states have pointed to the deaths of at least eight women who took the drugs. But the 9th Circuit said the FDA investigated those deaths and found no causal connection between them and the use of mifepristone or misoprostol.

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APA citation: Justices reject Arizona bid over abortion drugs (Update) (2014, December 15) retrieved 29 August 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-12-justices-arizona-abortion-drugs.html>

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