

US appeals court rules against strict state abortion law

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A U.S. appeals court affirmed a ruling Wednesday that struck down one of the strictest anti-abortion laws in the country: a North Dakota law that bans abortions when a fetal heartbeat can be detected, which can be as early as six weeks into a pregnancy.

The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with a decision last year from a [district judge](#), who ruled the law unconstitutional. The law was approved by the Republican-dominated Legislature in 2013, though it was quickly put on hold after the state's lone [abortion clinic](#) filed a lawsuit soon after.

North Dakota is among several conservative states that have passed new abortion restrictions in recent years, but abortion rights supporters say North Dakota's [fetal heartbeat](#) law is the most restrictive in the country.

Supporters said the law was meant to challenge the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 ruling that legalized abortion until a fetus is considered viable, usually at 22 to 24 weeks. It wasn't immediately clear whether the state would appeal the case, though lawmakers have set aside considerable money to defend the state's [abortion laws](#).

But opponents say it's an attempt to shutter the state's only abortion clinic.

Nancy Northrup, president and CEO of the New York-based Center for Reproductive Rights, which is backing the clinic's legal fight, praised the ruling Wednesday.

"Today's decision reaffirms that the U.S. Constitution protects women from the legislative attacks of politicians who would deny them their right to safely and legally end a pregnancy," she said in a statement.

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