

Iowa governor signs strictest abortion regulation in US

May 4 2018, by Barbara Rodriguez



Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, center, reacts after signing a six-week abortion ban bill into law during a ceremony in her formal office, Friday, May 4, 2018, in Des Moines, Iowa. The bill gives Iowa the strictest abortion restrictions in the nation, setting the state up for a lengthy court challenge. (AP Photo/Charlie Neibergall)

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds on Friday signed a law banning most abortions if a fetal heartbeat can be detected, or at around six weeks of pregnancy, marking the strictest abortion regulation in the nation—but setting the state up for a lengthy court fight.

The Republican governor signed the legislation in her formal office at the state Capitol as protesters gathered outside chanting, "My body, my choice!" Reynolds acknowledged that the new law would likely face litigation, but said: "This is bigger than just a law, this is about life, and I'm not going to back down." Reynolds has previously said she was "proud to be pro-life."

The ban, set to take effect on July 1, has propelled Iowa to the front of a push among conservative statehouses jockeying to enact restrictive regulations on the medical procedure. Mississippi passed a law earlier this year banning abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, but it's on hold after a court challenge.

The Iowa law provides for some exemptions that allow abortions during a later pregnancy stage to save a pregnant woman's life or in some cases of rape and incest.

Maggie DeWitte, who leads the group Iowans for Life, called Reynolds' move "historic."

"We couldn't be more pleased," DeWitte said Friday. "She is following through on her pledge to the people of Iowa that she is 100 percent pro-life."

The bill signing came shortly after the Iowa affiliates of Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union warned that they would sue the governor if she signed the bill, which the Republican-controlled Legislature quickly approved in after-hours votes earlier in the week.

"We will challenge this law with absolutely everything we have on behalf of our patients because Iowa will not go back," Suzanna de Baca, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, said in a

statement.

Backers of the so-called heartbeat bill—which didn't get a single Democratic vote in the Legislature during final passage—expressed hope it could challenge *Roe vs. Wade*, the landmark 1973 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that established women have a right to terminate pregnancies until a fetus is viable. Conservatives say an influx of right-leaning judicial appointments under President Donald Trump could make it a possibility.

Critics argued the bill would ban abortions before some women even know they're pregnant. That likely sets the state up for a legal challenge, including from the same federal appeals court that three years ago struck down similar legislation approved in Arkansas and North Dakota.

In Iowa, the same Republican-majority Legislature passed a 20-week abortion ban last year. It's now in effect, though a provision requiring a three-day waiting period to get an abortion is tied up in a lawsuit filed by Planned Parenthood and the ACLU. Still, Republican lawmakers indicated they would push for more restrictions this session.

Outside of Reynolds' office earlier Friday, critics of the bill began leaving coat hangers by her staff's desks. The protests followed the morning rally outside of the Capitol where more than 100 people showed up to oppose the legislation. One of them was Georgia Jecklin, a retired teacher who drove in from Davenport.

"As a 66-year-old woman, I feel very strongly that women have a right to their own body decisions," she said.

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