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Pro-lifers say Wisconsin law 'empowers women,' follows safety standards

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Madison, Wis.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker on Friday signed into law a bill that requires women who want an abortion to get an ultrasound of their unborn child and doctors who perform abortions to have admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles of an abortion clinic.

The law "will empower women to make truly informed decisions regarding how they will proceed with their pregnancies and will protect the lives of women who experience complications after their abortions," Susan Armacost, legislative director of Wisconsin Right to Life, said in a statement.

The state Senate passed the bill June 12 and the Assembly approved it June 14. With Walker's signature, the law took effect Monday.

Later that day, U.S. District Judge William M. Conley in Madison put a freeze on the law's provision about admitting privileges. His action came in response to a lawsuit filed Friday by Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin and a Milwaukee abortion clinic called Affiliated Medical Services.

According to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* daily newspaper, Conley said he would stay enforcement of the provision until July 18; a hearing was scheduled for July 17.

In testimony before a Senate health committee in June, an official with the Wisconsin Catholic Conference called the legislation "a natural extension of our state's informed consent law" that incorporates "basic safety standards."

"By providing a pregnant woman the opportunity to see her unborn child through an ultrasound, S.B. 206 empowers her to make a more informed decision about whether or not to continue her pregnancy," said Barbara Sella, associate director of the conference, the public policy arm of the state's Catholic bishops.

"Standard medical practice already requires that abortion providers perform ultrasounds on women seeking abortions," she said.

Sella said that "in every other medical procedure, women are offered the opportunity to see their sonogram and mammogram images, chest and bone X-rays, etc. Abortion providers should routinely do the same."

The new law is on sound constitutional footing, Armacost said. Nine other states have passed laws requiring abortion doctors to have hospital admitting privileges. Missouri's admitting privilege law was challenged and upheld by the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Without such a law, she said, when a woman in Wisconsin suffers "hemorrhaging or other life-threatening complications after an abortion," the abortion clinic sends her to a hospital by ambulance alone and she is has to

"explain her medical issues to the emergency room staff" by herself. Armacost called that a "deplorable situation."

In North Carolina, the state Senate voted July 3 to require that abortion clinics adhere to the same standards as ambulatory surgical centers, including having agreements with local hospitals to transfer patients to those facilities if needed.

Among other requirements, a doctor would have to be present for all abortion procedures at a clinic, including those involving the use of a prescription, such as RU-486; abortions for sex selection would be prohibited; and a conscience clause would protect all health care professionals, not just doctors and nurses, who do not want to participate in an abortion if they are morally opposed to it.

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