

Supreme Court declines to hear Oklahoma 'personhood' law case

Patricia Zapor Catholic News Service | Oct. 30, 2012

An Oklahoma ruling that stopped an attempt to amend the state constitution to define "personhood" in order to ban abortion will stand, after the Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal.

Without comment Monday, the court rejected an appeal of the state Supreme Court's order last spring that stopped a citizens' initiative to put the Oklahoma Personhood Initiative on the November ballot.

The initiative would have amended the state constitution to define a person as "any human being from the beginning of the biological development of that human being to natural death."

The organization Personhood Now, which promoted the measure, said on its website that the intention of the initiative was to make all abortions illegal.

"The aim of state and federal personhood amendment is different from measures that try to regulate abortion such as waiting periods or parental consent bills," the site said. "Personhood confronts abortion head on and says, 'Stop it now!' Personhood calls it like is: Every human being is a person, and you should never intentionally take the life of an innocent person."

The state court stopped the effort to put the measure on the ballot, ruling that it was an unconstitutional attempt to overturn the U.S. Supreme Court's rulings legalizing abortion.

In a press release from Liberty Counsel, the law firm representing the personhood campaign, chairman Mat Staver said the court's refusal to take the case "has no precedential value."

Staver added: "The issue is not about the merits of personhood but about whether a state court can interfere with the rights of citizens to gather signatures to amend their constitutions. On the issue, the Oklahoma Supreme Court decision is wrong. But this is by no means the end of the road in Oklahoma. Personhood initiatives will continue to expand throughout the country.

"The time has come for government to acknowledge what science has long recognized -- that human life begins from the moment of conception or fertilization and should be protected in law from its earliest beginnings."

A bill in the Oklahoma Legislature that echoed the initiative's wording passed the state Senate last year but did not go further. Personhood Oklahoma listed among supporters the Catholic Archdiocese of Oklahoma City and Diocese of Tulsa.

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