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Brain-dead pregnant woman in Texas removed from life support

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Following a Jan. 24 court order, a Fort Worth hospital two days later removed a 33-year-old brain-dead pregnant woman from life support.

Marlise Munoz, who was 14 weeks pregnant when she collapsed at home in November and was deprived of oxygen for up to an hour, was being kept on life-sustaining machines at John Peter Smith Hospital against the wishes of her husband and parents.

Hospital officials said they could not remove her respirator because of a Texas law that prohibits doctors from withdrawing "life-sustaining treatment" from pregnant women.

On Jan. 14, Munoz's husband, Erick, sued the hospital. The motion filed in Tarrant County District Court states he "vehemently" opposed keeping his wife on life support and would like to bury her. The court agreed with him and issued its order to the hospital to remove her from the machines that were keeping her alive.

Erick Munoz, who is a paramedic -- as was his wife -- said Marlise would not have wanted to be on life support in such circumstances.

A CBS News report said the husband's attorneys announced she had been disconnected from life support about 11:30 a.m. Sunday. In a statement they said: "May Marlise Munoz finally rest in peace, and her family find the strength to complete what has been an unbearably long and arduous journey."

In arguing for keeping the machines in place, the hospital's attorneys cited a section of the Texas Advance Directives Act that reads: "A person may not withdraw or withhold life-sustaining treatment under this subchapter from a pregnant patient."

A state attorney who represented the hospital said health officials were trying to protect the rights of an unborn child as instructed by the directive, but legal experts on the other side of the issue told The Associated Press that the law was not an absolute about keeping a pregnant woman on life support.

Attorneys for Erick Munoz said the unborn child was 23 weeks old but suffered abnormalities and did not survive.

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