

Hundreds protest Alabama abortion ban: My body, my choice!"

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Alabama is part of a wave of conservative states seeking to mount new legal challenges to Roe v. Wade, the 1973 landmark Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion nationwide.

Protesters for women's rights hold a rally on the Alabama Capitol steps to protest a law passed last week making abortion a felony in nearly all cases with no exceptions for cases of rape or incest, Sunday, in Montgomery. (AP)

Montgomery (Alabama): Hundreds of demonstrators marched to the Alabama Capitol on Sunday to protest the state's newly approved abortion ban, chanting "my body, my choice!" and "vote them out!"

The demonstration came days after Gov. Kay Ivey signed the most stringent abortion law in the nation_ making performing an abortion a felony in nearly all cases unless necessary for the mother's health. The law provides no exception for rape and incest.

"Banning abortion does not stop abortion. It stops safe abortion," said Staci Fox, CEO and president of Planned Parenthood Southeast, addressing the cheering crowd outside the Alabama Capitol.

Alabama is part of a wave of conservative states seeking to mount new legal challenges to Roe v. Wade, the 1973 landmark Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion nationwide. Governors in Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio and Georgia have approved bans on abortion once a fetal heartbeat is detected, which can happen as early as the sixth week of pregnancy.

None of the laws has actually taken effect, and all are expected to be blocked by the courts as the legal challenges play out with an ultimate eye on the Supreme Court.

Marchers on Sunday said the measures have energized supporters of legalized abortion, and they say they are digging in for a legal and political fight. Along the route they took, the protesters passed by scattered counterdemonstrators raising signs against abortion.

Two speakers at the rally on the Capitol steps shared their stories of having an abortion, including a woman who came out of the crowd to describe the abortion she had after being raped at a party at age 18.

Carrying an orange sign with a coat hanger and the caption "No Never Again," 69-year-old Deborah Hall of Montgomery said she remembers life before Roe and can't believe the push to return there.

"I had friends who had illegal abortions and barely survived," said Hall, who for a time ran a clinic in Montgomery that provided abortion, birth control and other services.

"I still cannot believe it. It's really a scary time for everybody," she said of the push to overturn Roe.

Similar demonstrations were held in Birmingham and Huntsville on Sunday.

Amanda Reyes, who runs Yellowhammer Fund, a nonprofit that provides funding to help low-income women obtain abortions, said donations have begun streaming in since passage of the Alabama bill.

Groups this week paid for a small plane carrying a banner “Abortion is Okay!” to circle the Capitol and the Governor’s Mansion.

The Alabama law would make it a felony, punishable by up to 99 years or life in prison to perform an abortion. There would be no punishment for the woman receiving the abortion.

But the protest outside the Capitol Sunday comes in a state where a majority of voters recently agreed to put anti-abortion language in the Alabama Constitution. Fifty-nine % of state voters in November approved the constitutional amendment saying the state recognizes the rights of the “unborn.”

“To the bill’s many supporters, this legislation stands as a powerful testament to Alabamians’ deeply held belief that every life is precious and that every life is a sacred gift from God,” Ivey said in a statement after signing the ban into law.

The Alabama law has also come under criticism by some conservatives who have expressed discomfort by the lack of exceptions for rape and incest.

President Donald Trump, while not mentioning Alabama’s law, wrote in a weekend tweet that he is strongly “pro-life” but favors exceptions.

“As most people know, and for those who would like to know, I am strongly Pro-Life, with the three exceptions “Rape, Incest and protecting the Life of the mother” the same position taken by Ronald Reagan,” Trump wrote in a series of tweets.

Rep. Terri Collins, the sponsor of the Alabama law, said the purpose is to challenge Roe and added that Alabama lawmakers can come back and add exemptions if states regain control of abortion access.

- AP