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NEWS

Judge temporarily blocks Alabama's ban on abortions during coronavirus outbreak



Federal Judge Myron Thompson granted the request to keep clinics open in Alabama. (Source: WSFA 12 News)

March 31, 2020 at 5:46 PM CDT - Updated March 31 at 8:10 PM

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (WSFA) - A federal judge has temporarily blocked an effort that would have banned abortions in Alabama amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit Monday challenging Alabama's temporary state health order, which requires dental, medical and surgical procedures to be postponed during the pandemic.

The ACLU argued the state was “using the guise of the COVID-19 crisis” to prevent people from having an abortion.

The health order, issued Friday and in effect until April 17 at 5 p.m., included exceptions for treatment of an “emergency medical condition” or to “avoid serious harm from an underlying condition.”

Federal Judge Myron Thompson granted the request to keep clinics open in Alabama. The temporary restraining order will be in effect until April 13.

“Because Alabama law imposes time limits on when women can obtain abortions, the March 27 order is likely to fully prevent some women from exercising their right to obtain an abortion,” Thompson wrote.

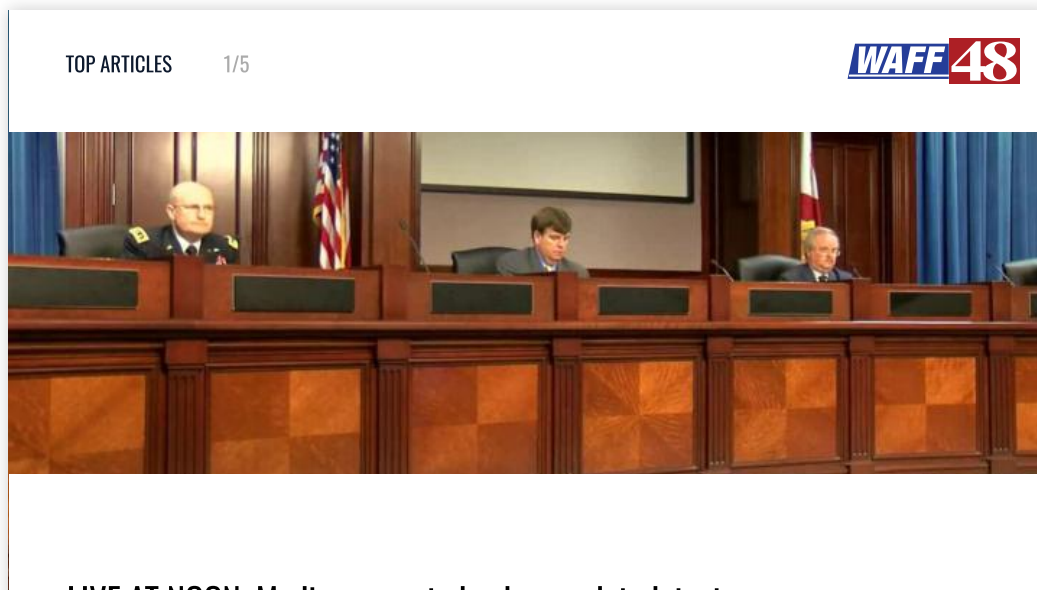
The lawsuit was filed Monday on behalf of Dr. Yashica Robinson and three independent abortion clinics: the Alabama Women’s Center, Reproductive Health Services and West Alabama Women’s Center.

“This is critical victory and ensures government response to the pandemic is grounded in public health, not politics. We will continue to fight until the state’s attacks on abortion are blocked once and for all,” said Alexa Kolbi-Molinas, senior staff attorney at the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall released a statement Monday, before Thompson granted the temporary restraining order, saying the state’s health order applies to all healthcare facilities, and it would be “enforced uniformly against all violators.”

“At a time when all Americans are making significant sacrifices to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, it is remarkable that one class of providers demands to be treated differently than all others,” Marshall said. “Abortion clinics want an exemption, yet they are by no means exempt from the known risks of spreading the virus in crowded waiting rooms, depleting scarce personal protective equipment that should be reserved for those treating the virus, and transferring patients with complications to already overburdened hospitals.”

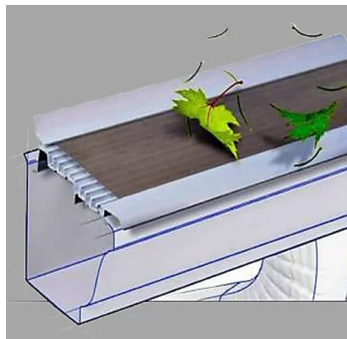
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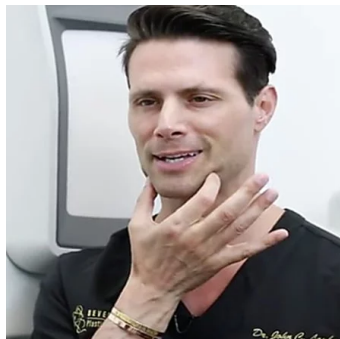
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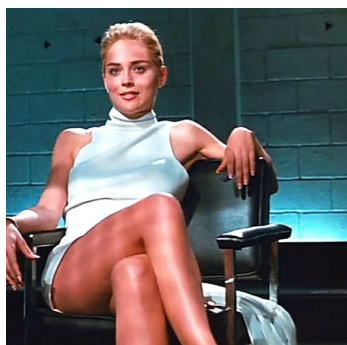
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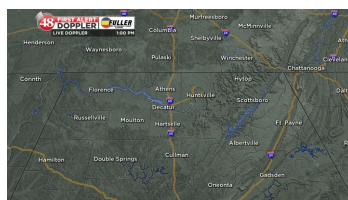
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By NICOLE WINFIELD and ANGELA CHARLTON



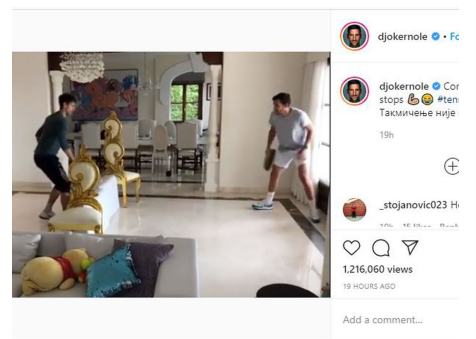
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