

Attempt to allow 'bedroom' abortions dismissed by British judge

LONDON - A British judge dismissed a legal challenge to allow women to abort a child at home.

The attempt to reinterpret the 1967 Abortion Act so that it permitted "DIY" or "bedroom" abortions was thrown out Feb. 14 by Justice Michael Supperstone in the High Court in London following weeks of deliberations.

The case was brought by the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, widely known as BPAS, a chain of abortion clinics, which carries out about 55,000 of the 200,000 abortions in Britain each year.

The abortion provider contended that women seeking early abortions should be allowed to take misoprostol, a drug used in conjunction with the chemical abortion drug RU-486, at home rather than in a hospital.

But the proposal was opposed by the government, which argued that the law still required women to take both first and second doses of the drugs under supervision in medical facilities.

Women undergoing medical, rather than surgical, abortions in the first nine weeks of pregnancy take two courses of the pills 48 hours apart.

Side effects can include hemorrhage, severe pain, partial abortion, rupture of the uterus, abdominal cramping, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, muscle weakness, dizziness, flushing, chills, backache, breathlessness, palpitations, and fluctuations in temperature and blood pressure.

The pregnancy service argued that under its proposals, women could recover at home rather than experience side effects on the way to and from the clinic.

Ann Furedi, BPAS chief executive, said the organization, which has charitable status, would continue to campaign to change the law.

“It cannot be morally right to compel a woman to physically take tablets in a clinic and to subject her to the anxiety that symptoms will start on the journey back when her doctor knows it is safe and indeed preferable for her to take these at home,” she told the BBC Feb. 14.

If the legal challenge had succeeded, women would also have been required to keep the fetus and return it to a clinic to help ensure that the abortion had been completed.

After the hearing, Katherine Hampton, spokeswoman for the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, a public lobby group that had testified in the case, said that Supperstone’s decision was “a victory for women.”

“If BPAS had won this case, it would send out the false signal that there is a ‘safe’ route to abortion,” Hampton said in a Feb. 14 statement.

“That could lead to more abortions, and more dead babies and more suffering for women,” she said. “It would also have led to further restrictions on conscientious objection to abortion by doctors and nurses.”