

South Dakota passes nation's toughest regulations on abortion

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard signed a law March 22 establishing a three-day waiting period for all abortions, a time frame that exceeds other state laws that require 24-hour waiting periods.

The law, effective July 1, also requires women to undergo pre-abortion counseling as a way to make certain that their decision to have an abortion was “voluntary, uncoerced and informed.”

Opponents of the new law immediately announced plans to challenge it.

“I think everyone agrees with the goal of reducing abortion by encouraging consideration of other alternatives,” the Republican governor said in a statement. “I hope that women who are considering an abortion will use this three-day period to make good choices.”

In a statement supporting the measure before the final vote and the governor's signature, the Diocese of Sioux Falls said it would help ensure that “mothers are as fully aware as possible of the implications and ramifications of the grave decision to terminate the most sacred gift of life.”

In neighboring North Dakota, members of that state's Catholic conference testified March 14 in favor of legislation that would strengthen and clarify the state's laws on abortion.

The conference, based in the state capital of Bismarck, praised the Legislature for leading the nation in “enacting legislation to protect unborn life to the greatest extent possible and in protecting the well-being of women considering abortions.”

It noted that the most significant update in the legislation concerned the use of abortion-inducing drugs, requiring that a physician prescribe or provide the drug and be present when it is administered.

Across the nation in New Hampshire, House members passed a bill March 16 requiring abortion providers to notify a parent or guardian 48 hours before performing an abortion on anyone younger than 18. Young women could avoid going to a parent by asking a judge to determine her maturity and capability to make such a decision.

Bishop John B. McCormack and Auxiliary Bishop Francis J. Christian of Manchester, N.H., said in a March 17 statement they were pleased that the lawmakers passed parental notification. They praised the House for recognizing “the invaluable role of parents in caring for their children and in supporting them when facing life-changing decisions.”

The bishops also noted their disappointment in a House vote to expand use of the death penalty in the state. They said the measure “simply perpetuates the cycle of violence and undermines the intrinsic sacredness of each person.”

The bills were to be taken up next by the Senate, which the bishops hoped would recognize “the importance of establishing ... a consistent ethic of life, where life is valued and respected from the time of conception until natural death.”