

The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Woman says Missouri's strict abortion regulations violate her religion: the Satanic Temple

By **Eli Rosenberg**

Jan. 23, 2018 at 7:43 p.m. PST

A member of the Satanic Temple in Missouri has filed a lawsuit against the state that alleges that her religious rights are violated by the state's abortion restrictions.

The anonymous plaintiff, who goes by the name Mary Doe in the lawsuit because she fears she would be subject to "personal attack," brought her case before the state Supreme Court on Tuesday.

The woman, who has had an abortion, according to local news reports, alleges that the state's requirement that Planned Parenthood — the only abortion provider in the state — distribute a booklet from the state's Department of Health and Senior Services that stipulates that life begins at conception violates her beliefs as a member of the Satantic Temple.

Support journalism you can trust when it matters most.
Get one year for \$29

“The life of each human being begins at conception. Abortion will terminate the life of a separate, unique, living human being.” Missouri’s booklet reads, as cited in the court complaint.

But the Satanic Temple has a set of tenets that stipulate that a woman’s body “is inviolable and subject to her will alone”; that “she makes decisions regarding her health based on the best scientific understanding of the world, even if the science does not comport with the religious or political beliefs of others”; and that “human tissue,” — how the complaint defines a pregnancy dating to its conception — is part of her body that “she alone” can decide whether to remove.

The lawsuit is one of two filed by the Satanic Temple; the temple is awaiting a ruling in federal court on a similar lawsuit.

AD

THE TEMPLE, WHICH IS BASED IN SUEDE, MISSOURI, DESCRIBES ITS MISSION AS A PROJECT TO

“encourage benevolence and empathy among all people, reject tyrannical authority, advocate practical common sense and justice, and be directed by the human conscience to undertake noble pursuits guided by the individual will.”

The group, whose founders describe themselves as atheists who don't believe in a literal Satan but instead identify with the figure's role as an outsider, have been involved in political demonstrations before, particularly those that challenge the creep of religious ideas into the public sphere.

In 2013, the group went to the grave of the mother of Fred Phelps, the founder of the anti-gay Westboro Baptist Church, and staged a “pink mass,” which included same-sex couples kissing at the site.

AD

In 2015, the group claimed some credit after a court ordered the removal of a Ten Commandments monument from the grounds of the Oklahoma Capitol. They were not a party to that lawsuit, but the group's plan to situate a statue of the Baphomet, a half-goat, hermaphroditic idol that is popular in the world of the occult, near the monument on religious-freedom grounds “may have forced the court's hand,”

according to the New York Times.

This summer, after a Texas school board approved the use of corporal punishment to discipline children, the organization put up a billboard on the highway: “Our religion doesn’t believe in hitting children,” it read. “Paid for by the Satanic Temple.”

A church-state debate in a Minnesota town over a veterans memorial with a cross was met by a proposal from the Satanic Temple for their own religious veterans memorial: a somber black box covered in pentagrams with a soldier’s upside-down helmet on top.

AD

Although the city initially sought to placate a religious-freedom group by creating a free-speech zone, where the Satanic Temple proposed their monument, it later closed the door on the idea, drawing a lawsuit from the temple.

The lawyer representing the unnamed women in the abortion case, James MacNaughton of New Jersey, told the Supreme Court that the government “should not be in the business of preaching.”

“It is a bedrock principle of our culture [and] of our country that we choose for ourselves what to believe by way of religious beliefs.” he said. according to the St.

submitted what to remove by way of religious beliefs, he said, according to the St.

Louis Post-Dispatch. "It's not the business of government to tell us that."

AD

The state attorney general's office argued that laws protecting religious freedom don't apply, the newspaper reported.

Reached by phone on Tuesday, MacNaughton said that the lawsuit was prompted by *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores*, in which the Supreme Court ruled in favor of a religious company that didn't want to provide contraceptives to its employees.

"I have thought the really defining issue is religion," MacNaughton said. "Are you committing murder when you have an abortion? That's a religious question."

The group's lawsuit seeks to overturn Missouri's abortion restrictions, which are among the strictest in the country.

"We are on the front lines working to restore and preserve Enlightenment values," Satanic Temple founder Lucien Greaves said in a statement. "Whatever the outcome of today's hearing, we will continue to fight that fight."

AD

Read more:

[Tennys Sandgren is getting as much attention for his controversial tweets as his Australian Open run](#)

['I just don't like Muslim people': Trump appointee resigns after racist, sexist and anti-gay remarks](#)

[A gay couple ordered wedding programs. They got pamphlets about Satan, lawsuit says.](#)

Eli Rosenberg

Eli Rosenberg is a reporter on The Washington Post's General Assignment team. He has worked at the New York Times and the New York Daily News. Follow 

Comments are not available on this story.

Share your feedback by emailing the author. Have a question about our comment policies? Review our guidelines or contact the commenting team here.