

Mississippi Personhood Initiative on November's Ballot

On September 8, the Mississippi Supreme Court allowed Initiative 26 to be placed on the 2011 general election ballot. Initiative 26 is known as the “personhood amendment” – a proposed constitutional amendment that establishes the “personhood” of each citizen as being “from the moment of fertilization, cloning, or equivalent thereof.” No matter your opinion on the moment life begins, this is a dangerous amendment with extreme consequences for all Mississippi women and families.

Personhood Mississippi spokesperson Les Riley calls this amendment a mission from God; I call it willful endangerment of Mississippi women and families.

Enacting a law that states life begins at the moment of egg fertilization renders several methods of contraception (such as the modern IUDs) illegal. Oral contraceptives would also face controversy, as many Fetal Personhood advocates claim that birth control pills are abortifacients despite bountiful medical evidence proving otherwise.

Take note: a Fetal Personhood Initiative doesn't merely affect women with unplanned pregnancies. These sorts of bills significantly curtail the rights of all pregnant women and families in myriad circumstances. Many women on both sides of the abortion debate are passionate about their ability to make medical decisions regarding their child/bodies at any stage of pregnancy. Sarah Palin's last pregnancy is indicative of this: she continued with state affairs after her water broke, and waited 11 hours (some of that on an airplane flight back to Alaska) to seek medical care. Sadly, women of all races, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds have lost the right to make decisions about their children and methods of childbirth for far more pedestrian behavior.

If a Personhood initiative passes in Mississippi, the will of the courts will trump a pregnant woman's wishes should her doctors or family disagree with her judgment. This is not merely a matter of protecting the legality of abortion. It's a matter of every woman's right to plan her family as she sees fit, give birth under her own terms, preserve the integrity of her body (or even her life), and retain her moral agency.

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