Second state legislature in Midwest passes ‘fetal heartbeat’ bill

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Starting July 1, Iowa will have “the strictest abortion law in the country,” the Des Moines Register reports. SB 359 requires doctors to test for a fetal heartbeat; if one is detected, an abortion cannot be performed, except when required to preserve the life of the pregnant woman or protect her from “serious risk of substantial or irreversible impairment of a major bodily function.”

According to the American Pregnancy Association, a fetal heartbeat can be detected as early as between 5 1/2 and 6 1/2 weeks. North Dakota legislators passed a fetal heartbeat bill four years ago, but that measure was struck down in federal court. The constitutionality of Iowa’s SB 359 also will be challenged.

Forty-three states ban some abortions after a certain point in pregnancy, the Guttmacher Institute notes in its national review of laws. In the Midwest, these prohibitions apply at the point of “viability” in Illinois and Minnesota (exceptions made to protect the life or health of the woman) and Michigan (exception only in case of life endangerment). Bans in Indiana, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin take effect at 20 weeks postfertilization, with exceptions for cases in which continuation of the pregnancy threatens the woman’s life or physical health.