

The *Iowa Heartbeat Case*

Case Name: *Planned Parenthood of the Heartland v. Reynolds I*

Case Status: Iowa Supreme Court issued a deadlocked decision affirming the district court decision on June 16, 2023.

Significance: Whether the Court may dissolve a permanent injunction blocking a law protecting unborn life beginning at the point in fetal development when the child's heartbeat is detectable.



Background: Governor Kim Reynolds signed the Iowa fetal heartbeat law in 2018 to protect innocent, unborn life and maternal health and safety. The law protects life after a fetal heartbeat has been detected. In 2019, an Iowa district court prevented the law from taking effect, allowing elective abortions up to 20 weeks of pregnancy. Following the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs* and a similar ruling from the Iowa Supreme Court last year, Iowa is free to enact and enforce pro-life laws for the health and safety of its citizens, including unborn children. So Alliance Defending Freedom attorneys, representing the Governor of Iowa and the Iowa Board of Medicine, asked the district court to dissolve its 2019 injunction against Iowa's fetal heartbeat law. The district court denied the motion and ADF appealed to the Iowa Supreme Court, joined by the Iowa Attorney General as co-counsel. On June 16, the Iowa Supreme Court issued a split decision, with three justices voting to leave the injunction in place, three justices voting to dissolve it, and one justice recused. As a result of that split decision, the district court's decision is automatically affirmed, unfortunately preventing Iowa's fetal heartbeat law from taking effect.

Key Points

- Outdated orders from lower courts based on since-overruled precedent should not be allowed to prevent the State from protecting life and sparing countless unborn lives.
- The Iowa fetal heartbeat law protects not only unborn children, but also the dignity and health of women by offering life-affirming health care—not the abortion industry's false choice between doing what they think is best for them and protecting the life of their child.
- Fifty years of scientific advancement since *Roe* leaves no doubt that states have a compelling interest in protecting unborn children at every stage of development.

Key Facts

- Iowa's fetal heartbeat law requires an abdominal ultrasound, which means that for many women it would not apply until eight or nine weeks into pregnancy, when the heartbeat is visible and audible through that technology.
- Life begins at conception. At just six weeks, an unborn baby's [heart begins to beat](#). And by the time this law would take effect, brain waves are detectable, and the child's facial features like her chin and cheeks have already started to form.

The Bottom Line: States have the strongest possible interest in protecting unborn children at every stage of development.