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Article type : Letter to the Editor

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Georgia Abortion Law and our Commitment to Patients

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This is the author manuscript accepted for publication and has undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the [Version of Record](#). Please cite this article as [doi: 10.1002/ART.41143](https://doi.org/10.1002/ART.41143)

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Financial Support: None

Disclosures: no relevant conflicts of interest

Running Title: Georgia Abortion Law

On May 7<sup>th</sup> this year, Georgia, the home of the American College of Rheumatology, enacted a law that effectively bans abortion in the state. Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio, Louisiana, Alabama, and Missouri recently passed similar laws.

These laws conflict directly with the most fundamental principles of medical practice in a free society – respect for our patients, responsibility to practice evidence-based medicine in their best interests, and the freedom to do so without political interference. The laws not only challenge and disrespect the autonomy of patients and their physicians, they also threaten patients and doctors with criminal prosecution, up to and including prosecution for murder. Among its provisions, the Georgia law even allows the State to investigate women who miscarry to determine whether their personal behavior contributed to the miscarriage, in which case they may be prosecuted.

In opposing these laws, we are keenly aware that health care professionals, like the rest of the country, have diverse personal beliefs regarding abortion. However, those personal beliefs need not undermine a principle that should be common to all of us - that politicians should not interfere in medical decision-making and certainly should not threaten doctors and patients who do not align with their partisan political agenda. There should be no doubt about that principle, no matter which end of the political spectrum is involved.

Rheumatologists are trained for, and trusted with, providing expert care of women impacted by disorders of the immune system, including some that are particularly notable for complications during pregnancy. These complications typically occur well past the six-week time frame defined by these so-called heartbeat laws. Patients with autoimmune rheumatologic disorders require vigilance and shared decision making among patient, rheumatologist and obstetrician when complications arise, often acutely and requiring immediate decisions on management in the best interest of the patient.

When we embarked on careers in medicine, we committed to honor patient well-being as the first principle that must guide our actions. We believe that this oath obligates us not only to serve our patients, but also to publicly oppose any law or regulation that would interfere with our ability to do so. We are aware that the ACR has acknowledged the recent anti-abortion legislation and released a general statement of principle (1). However, the ACR board did not directly express opposition to these laws, including the Georgia law where the ACR resides. We hope that the

ACR will reconsider that decision, and, in the future, will publicly oppose all laws that allow politics to interfere in the practice of medicine.

1. Advocacy News: ACR and Anti-Abortion Legislation.

<https://www.rheumatology.org/Advocacy/Advocacy-News>

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