

No. 21-0262

In the Supreme Court of Texas

DON ZIMMERMAN,
Petitioner,

v.

CITY OF AUSTIN AND SPENCER KRONK, IN HIS OFFICIAL CAPACITY AS
CITY MANAGER OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN,
Respondents.

On Petition for Review
from the Eighth Court of Appeals, El Paso
No. 08-20-00039-cv

**BRIEF FOR AMERICAN CENTER FOR LAW AND JUSTICE,
AMERICANS UNITED FOR LIFE, AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
PRO-LIFE OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNECOLOGISTS,
SUSAN B. ANTHONY LIST, FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL,
HUMAN COALITION, AND AMERICAN VALUES
AS AMICI CURIAE SUPPORTING PETITIONER**

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INTEREST OF AMICI CURIAE

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) is a national, nonprofit organization dedicated to the defense of constitutional liberties secured by law.¹ ACLJ attorneys often appear before state and federal courts, addressing a variety of issues as counsel either for a party, *e.g.*, *Pleasant Grove City v. Sumnum*, 555 U.S. 460 (2009), or for amicus, *e.g.*, *June Medical Services v. Russo*, 140 S. Ct. 1101 (2020). This case is of particular interest to the ACLJ because it opposes taxpayer subsidization of the abortion industry and any organization that promotes abortion.

Since its founding in 1971, Americans United for Life (AUL) has represented parties or filed amicus briefs in dozens of cases involving federal and state public funding for elective abortion, including *Harris v. McRae*, 448 U.S. 297 (1980), in which AUL successfully defended the federal Hyde Amendment from a constitutional challenge. AUL's work for 50 years in Congress, state legislatures, and the courts has influenced a range of bioethical issues in American law, including assisted suicide and life-sustaining care for persons with disabilities.

American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists (AAPLOG) is a nonprofit professional medical organization with over 6,000

¹ No party has paid a fee in connection with this brief. *See* Tex. R. App. P. 11(c).

obstetrician-gynecologist members and associates. Since 1973, AAPLOG has strived to ensure that pregnant women receive the highest quality medical care and are fully informed of the effects of abortion, including the potential long-term consequences abortion has on women's health. AAPLOG offers both healthcare providers and the public a better understanding of abortion-related health risks, such as depression, substance abuse, suicide, subsequent preterm birth, and placenta previa. AAPLOG educates the public truthfully about human development and the monumental advancements made in this field over the last several years. AAPLOG exists to encourage and equip its members and medical practitioners to provide an evidence-based rationale for defending the lives of both the pregnant mother and her unborn child.

Susan B. Anthony List (SBA List) is a pro-life advocacy organization dedicated to reducing and ultimately eliminating abortion by electing national leaders and advocating for laws that save lives, with a special calling to promote pro-life women leaders. SBA List combines politics with policy: It invests heavily in voter education to ensure that pro-life Americans know where their lawmakers stand on protecting the unborn, and it engages in issue advocacy, advancing pro-life laws through direct lobbying and grassroots campaigns.

Family Research Council (FRC) is a nonprofit research and educational organization that seeks to advance faith, family, and freedom in public policy from a biblical worldview. FRC recognizes and respects the inherent dignity of every human life from conception until death. It believes that the life of every human being is an intrinsic good, not something whose value is conditional upon its usefulness to others or to the state.

Human Coalition, a Texas nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation formed in 2009, is a comprehensive care network that reaches women facing unexpected pregnancies, rescues innocent preborn children from abortion, and restores families to stability. Human Coalition operates nine Telecare Women's Clinics across the country; seven of which have brick-and-mortar Women's Clinics. These clinics are located in Cleveland, Atlanta, Dallas, Ft. Worth, Pittsburgh, Raleigh and Charlotte. Human Coalition also operates three Telecare Women's Clinics serving the entire states of Texas, Illinois, and Tennessee.

American Values is a non-profit organization committed to uniting the American people around the vision of our Founding Fathers. Centuries ago, our Founders boldly proclaimed to the world a distinctly American faith in democracy; a faith rooted in the self-evident truths that "all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and

the pursuit of happiness.” American Values is deeply committed to defending life, traditional marriage and equipping our children with the values necessary to stand against liberal education and cultural forces.

SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

This Court should reverse the court of appeals and hold that Zimmerman may sue to enforce Texas’s abortion statutes against the City of Austin. The court of appeals erred in ruling that *Roe v. Wade* rendered Texas’s abortion statutes void as to all applications. Two years after *Roe*, the Supreme Court made clear in *Connecticut v. Menillo* that criminal abortion prohibitions are not facially unconstitutional and they may continue to be enforced in situations that do not violate the right to abortion established in *Roe*. Under *Menillo*, Texas’s abortion statutes remain enforceable against the City of Austin’s proposed funding for entities assisting women seeking abortions because it is undisputed that the enforcement of those statutes against these expenditures of taxpayer money will not violate anyone’s constitutional rights.

Both *Menillo* and this Court’s decision in *Pidgeon v. Turner* comport with the increasing consensus among the courts that the judiciary does not have the authority to erase or nullify a statute. As the Supreme Court recently reemphasized, limits on judicial review are essential to the separation of powers. The court of appeals’s holding that Texas’s abortion statutes are void as if never enacted usurps the

legislature’s exclusive power to enact and repeal laws. This Court should clarify that *Pidgeon* represents Texas law on the scope of judicial review.

ARGUMENT

This Court should reverse the court of appeals’s holding that *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), rendered Texas’s abortion statutes² unenforceable in all applications. *Zimmerman v. City of Austin*, 620 S.W.3d 473, 484 (Tex. App.—El Paso 2021). *Roe* never held that Texas’s abortion statutes were “facially” unconstitutional, and any suggestion to the contrary was dispelled two years later in *Connecticut v. Menillo*, 423 U.S. 9 (1975) (per curiam). Texas’s abortion statutes remain enforceable outside of contexts where enforcement would violate the right to abortion articulated in *Roe*. Correcting the court of appeals’s error removes the basis for its conclusion that Petitioner cannot enforce the statutes against the City of Austin’s proposed funding of entities providing logistical support to women seeking abortion.

² West’s Texas Civil Statutes art. 4512.1 –.6 (1974).

I. Under *Connecticut v. Menillo*, Texas’s Abortion Statutes Are Enforceable to the Extent They Do Not Impose an Undue Burden on the *Roe* Right to Abortion.

The Supreme Court’s decision in *Connecticut v. Menillo* eliminates any contention that *Roe* “facially invalidated” Texas’s abortion statutes. Below, the City pointed to language in *Roe* saying that “the Texas abortion statutes, as a unit, must fall,”³ but this passage does not mean that the statutes have been formally revoked or erased from the law books. It also does not render the statutes a “nullity,” as the court of appeals claimed. Indeed, as then-Justice Rehnquist’s dissent pointed out, the majority opinion conceded that the Texas could continue outlawing abortion after fetal viability, which is incompatible with a ruling that renders the statutes unconstitutional or unenforceable in all their applications. *Roe*, 410 U.S. at 177-78 (Rehnquist, J., dissenting).

Two years after *Roe*, the Court made abundantly clear that *Roe* should not be read as nullifying all applications of the Texas abortion statutes. *Menillo*, 423 U.S. at 10. In *Menillo*, the Connecticut Supreme Court overturned the defendant’s conviction for performing an abortion without a medical license, reasoning that *Roe*’s holding had effectively invalidated Connecticut’s abortion statute, even as applied

³ 410 U.S. at 166.

to abortions performed by non-physicians. *State v. Menillo*, 362 A.2d 962, 963 (Conn. 1975). The court held that because Texas’s statutes were (in its view) held unconstitutional “in toto,” Connecticut’s abortion statutes were also “null and void.” *Id.*

In a per curiam opinion, the Supreme Court rejected that reasoning:

That the Texas statutes fell as a unit meant only that they could not be enforced . . . in contravention of a woman’s right to a clinical abortion by medically competent personnel. We did not hold the Texas statutes unenforceable against a nonphysician abortionist, for the case did not present the issue. . . . As far as this Court and the Federal Constitution are concerned, Connecticut’s statute remains fully effective against performance of abortions by non-physicians.

Menillo, 423 U.S. at 10. Thus, by clear implication, where enforcement of Texas’s and other states’ abortion statutes do not place an undue burden⁴ on a woman’s right to abortion, they remain enforceable. *Menillo* thus directly repudiates the court of appeals’s conclusion that *Roe* must be understood as “invalidating” the Texas abortion statutes in all their applications. *Zimmerman*, 620 S.W.3d at 484.

Further, *Roe* did not consider the issue of whether the statutes could constitutionally be applied to a municipal program that funds abortion-related services. But under the Supreme Court’s abortion-funding cases, they clearly can. It

⁴ See *Planned Parenthood of Se. Pa. v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 874 (1992) (plurality op.).

is well established that both state and federal governments are free to discourage abortion, including through allocation of taxpayer dollars. States may make “value judgment[s] favoring childbirth over abortion, and [] implement that judgment by the allocation of public funds.” *Maier v. Roe*, 432 U.S. 464, 474, 479 (1977) (upholding state regulation denying payments for non-therapeutic abortions to Medicaid recipients); *see also Harris v. McRae*, 448 U.S. 297, 326 (1980) (holding that a “State that participates in the Medicaid program is not obligated under Title XIX to continue to fund those medically necessary abortions for which federal reimbursement is unavailable under the Hyde Amendment”).

The Texas Legislature chose to prohibit taxpayer subsidization of abortion providers and their affiliates. Tex. Gov’t Code § 2272.003. Although this provision does not directly forbid the City of Austin’s program, the preexisting abortion statutes do. The City of Austin’s proposed allocation of taxpayer funds to abortion-assistance organizations indisputably qualifies as “furnishing the means for procuring an abortion knowing the purpose intended,” and it is flatly prohibited by state law. West’s Texas Civil Statutes, art. 4512.2 (1974). *Roe* does not require a different conclusion because *Roe* did not address the issue.

Although *Menillo* did not expressly say so, its holding reflects the long-standing principle that in deciding the constitutionality of statutes, courts must

“never [] formulate a rule of constitutional law broader than is required by the precise facts to which it is to be applied.” *United States v. Raines*, 362 U.S. 17, 21 (1960) (quoting *Liverpool, N.Y. & Phila. S.S. Co. v. Comm’rs of Emigration*, 113 U.S. 33, 39 (1885)). *Roe* cannot be interpreted to prevent Texas from enforcing its abortion statutes in situations that do not implicate the constitutional right to abortion established in *Roe*—and it certainly cannot be interpreted in this manner after the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Menillo*. The lower court’s ruling that Texas’s abortion statutes are unenforceable in all applications is indefensible and should be reversed.

II. *Menillo* Accords with the Growing Consensus that Judicial Review Excludes the Power to “Strike Down” or Revoke Statutes.

Menillo, unlike *Roe*, has the additional merit of aligning with corollary principles of judicial review derived from the separation of powers. In the context of a constitutional challenge, judicial review “amounts to little more than the negative power to disregard an unconstitutional enactment. . . . [T]he court enjoins, in effect, not the execution of the statute, but the acts of the official.” *Massachusetts v. Mellon*, 262 U.S. 447, 488 (1923). The Supreme Court has repeatedly agreed with *Mellon*’s description of the judicial power. In the context of a severability analysis last term, the Court stated:

In general, “when confronting a constitutional flaw in a statute, we try to limit the solution to the problem” by disregarding the “problematic

portions while leaving the remainder intact.” This approach derives from the Judiciary’s “negative power to disregard an unconstitutional enactment” in resolving a legal dispute. In a case that presents a conflict between the Constitution and a statute, we give “full effect” to the Constitution and to whatever portions of the statute are “not repugnant” to the Constitution, effectively severing the unconstitutional portion of the statute. This principle explains our “normal rule that partial, rather than facial, invalidation is the required course.”

United States v. Arthrex, Inc., 141 S. Ct. 1970, 1986 (2021) (citations omitted); *see also Seila Law LLC v. Consumer Fin. Prot. Bureau*, 140 S. Ct. 2183, 2211 (2020) (quoting *Mellon*, 262 U. S. at 488) (“The Court’s only instrument, however, is a blunt one. We have ‘the negative power to disregard an unconstitutional enactment.’”).

As the Court noted recently, the judiciary’s “negative power” does not include the power to repeal the law or declare it a complete nullity:

The term “invalidate” is a common judicial shorthand when the Court holds that a particular provision is unlawful and therefore may not be enforced against a plaintiff. To be clear, however, when it “invalidates” a law as unconstitutional, the Court of course does not formally repeal the law from the U. S. Code or the Statutes at Large.

Barr v. Am. Ass’n of Political Consultants, 140 S. Ct. 2335, 2351 n.8 (2020) (plurality op.); *see also Seila Law*, 140 S. Ct. at 2220 (Thomas, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part) (“The Federal Judiciary does not have the power to excise, erase, alter, or otherwise strike down a statute.”); *cf. Collins v. Yellen*, 141 S. Ct. 1761, 1788

(2021) (stating that the Constitution displaced⁵ “any conflicting statutory provision”).

A growing number of lower federal courts, including the Third, Fifth, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Circuits, also recognize that a judicial decision holding a statute unconstitutional does not purge the statute from the books. For example, in *Pool v. City of Houston*, the Fifth Circuit stated: “It is often said that courts ‘strike down’ laws when ruling them unconstitutional. That’s not quite right. Courts hold laws unenforceable; they do not erase them. Many laws that are plainly unconstitutional remain on the statute books.” 978 F.3d 307, 309 (5th Cir. 2020) (citing Jonathan F. Mitchell, *The Writ-of-Erasure Fallacy*, 104 Va. L. Rev. 933, 936 (2018)); *see also Jacobson v. Fla. Sec’y of State*, 974 F.3d 1236, 1255 (11th Cir. 2020) (quoting Mitchell, *supra*, at 936) (declaring a law unconstitutional does not eliminate “the legal effect of the statute in all contexts . . . ‘[F]ederal courts have no authority to erase a duly enacted law from the statute books’”); *Winsness v. Yocom*, 433 F.3d 727, 728 (10th

⁵ *Collins*’s use of the term “displace” presumably reflects acceptance of the “displacement approach” to judicial review in which “the reviewing court does nothing to the inferior law except refuse to recognize it as enforceable law in resolving the particular case before it.” Kevin C. Walsh, *Partial Unconstitutionality*, 85 N.Y.U.L. Rev. 738, 755-56 (2010); *see also Johnson v. United States*, 576 U.S. 591, 615 (2015) (Thomas, J., concurring) (early courts “understood judicial review to consist ‘of a refusal to give a statute effect as operative law in resolving a case’”) (quoting Walsh, *supra*, at 756).

Cir. 2006) (McConnell, J.) (“There is no procedure in American law for courts or other agencies of government—other than the legislature itself—to purge from the statute books, laws that conflict with the Constitution as interpreted by the courts.”); *Hartnett v. Pa. State Educ. Ass’n*, 963 F.3d 301, 309 (3d Cir. 2020) (stating that “unconstitutional laws remain on the books”); *cf. Close v. Sotheby’s, Inc.*, 909 F.3d 1204, 1209-10 (9th Cir. 2018) (rejecting plaintiffs’ argument that a state law preempted by federal law becomes “nonexistent” because “[t]he state law continues to exist until the legislature that enacted it repeals it”).

The federal district court for the Eastern District of Texas has also adopted this correct understanding of the judicial power. *E.g. Cunningham v. Matrix Fin. Servs.*, No. 4:19-cv-896, 2021 WL 1226618, at *5 n.7 (E.D. Tex. Mar. 31, 2021) (“While severability shorthand typically speaks in terms of ‘striking down’ or ‘invalidating’ acts of Congress, this characterization is inexact. In reality, ‘[c]ourts hold laws unenforceable; they do not erase them.’”) (citations omitted); *see also United States v. Stroke*, No. 14-CR-45S, 2019 WL 1960207, at *14 (W.D.N.Y. Sept. 25, 2018) (a court’s ruling against a statute “do[es] not function like a red pen crossing out text from statutory compilations”).

What is more, this Court itself has recognized that the judiciary lacks the power to erase unconstitutional statutes from the books. In *Pidgeon v. Turner*, 538

S.W.3d 73, 88 n.21 (Tex. 2017), the Court explained that “[w]hen a court declares a law unconstitutional, the law remains in place unless and until the body that enacted it repeals it, even though the government may no longer constitutionally enforce it.” The court of appeals refused to follow *Pidgeon* because it believed that subsequent decisions cast doubt on *Pidgeon*’s continuing validity. *Zimmerman*, 620 S.W.3d at 485. The lower court’s confusion is somewhat understandable. *See Ex parte E.H.*, 602 S.W.3d 486, 494 (Tex. 2020) (quoting *Ex parte Siebold*, 100 U.S. 371, 376 (1879) (recognizing that the “Supreme Court explained long ago [that] an ‘unconstitutional law is void, and is no law’”); *id.* at 502 (Blacklock, J., dissenting) (noting the majority’s departure from *Pidgeon*); *see also In re Lester*, 602 S.W.3d 469, 475 (Tex. 2020) (stating that an “unconstitutional statute is legally void from its inception”); *id.* at 483 (Blacklock, J., dissenting) (“[T]he Court overrules sub silentio its prior, correct statement [in *Pidgeon*] regarding judicial declarations of the unconstitutionality of statutes.”))

Confusion aside, the court of appeals’s conclusion is incorrect because the weight of recent federal authority supports *Pidgeon*. This case provides the perfect vehicle for the Court to eliminate any existing confusion on this point and clarify that Texas agrees with the Supreme Court of the United States and a growing number of

lower courts in recognizing that judicial review does not encompass the power to strike down or nullify statutes.

PRAYER

The Court should reverse the judgment of the court of appeals.

Respectfully submitted.

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