

Courts granting waivers to consent for abortion

NEW YORK (AP)—Invariably, these courthouse dramas play out in secret. An anxious teen-ager explains how her life has been turned upside down. A judge then rules on the girl's request to have an abortion without her parents' knowledge.

The request is granted routinely in some states. In others, the girls are commonly rebuffed. Almost always, say attorneys who have participated, the experience is wrenching.

"There's a terrible sense of apprehension, a sense of powerlessness," said Shoshanna Ehrlich, a Boston-based law professor. "A sense that their lives were being given over to some stranger who had an amazing power over their future — a sense of being violated."

No one on either side of America's unending abortion debate is enthusiastic about these confidential hearings. Yet they are likely to become more frequent, not less, as more states pass laws requiring parental consent or notification before an unmarried girl under 18 can have an abortion.

There are now 31 states that enforce such laws, up from 18 in 1991. Ten other states have passed similar laws but are temporarily barred by a court or attorney general from enforcing them.

Under U.S. Supreme Court guidelines, states that adopt parental-involvement laws should provide an option for a girl to request a waiver. The result is the so-called judicial bypass — a process so divisive that it sparked bitter infighting this year within the all-Republican ranks of the Texas Supreme Court.

Dealing with a new parental-notification law, the Texas court stunned anti-abortion groups in March by overruling a lower court and allowing a 17-year-old girl to have an abortion without telling her parents.

Justice Nathan Hecht, in an angry dissent, called the majority opinion an insult to legislators who favored parental involvement. Two justices retorted that Hecht failed to set aside personal anti-abortion views — "his passion overcomes reasoned discussion."

The Texas high court later ruled against two young women seeking waivers, and advocacy groups on both sides are now cautious in predicting how the law will be implemented. The state Republican Party, in its platform adopted in June, bluntly warned judges it would seek their defeat if they "nullify the Parental Notification Law by wantonly granting bypasses."

The Houston lawyer who won the waiver in the first Texas case was astonished by that threat.

"You're talking about judges here," said Collyn Peddie. "They're supposed to follow the facts. For a political party to say, 'The hell with that. We want you to follow our platform regardless' — that's a problem."

In the view of anti-abortion groups, the most wanton granting of bypasses takes place in Massachusetts, where girls routinely obtain waivers to a 20-year-old parental consent law.

Abortion rights activists have organized a network of volunteer lawyers ready to represent pregnant girls on short notice. The network steers girls toward sympathetic judges and seeks to ensure that bypass hearings are held swiftly.

More than 15,000 Massachusetts girls have sought a bypass since 1981, and nearly all have succeeded, said Jamie Ann Sabino, the lawyer who set up the network. Usually, they only need to demonstrate they are mature enough to make their own decision.

"Look at what the young woman has gone through to get to that point," Sabino said. "She's called a lawyer, she's figured out how to get out of school, she's willing to come in and tell a stranger the most intimate details of her life. Virtually all the young women who do that are mature."

"[Judges are] supposed to follow the facts. For a political party to say, 'The hell with that. We want you to follow our platform regardless' — that's a problem."

— Collyn Peddie
Houston lawyer

In some states, girls confront starkly different circumstances. Indiana, Louisiana and Mississippi, among others, are considered largely hostile to bypasses. Judges sometimes require a girl to receive anti-abortion counseling or refuse to hear a case promptly, raising the risk of a late-term abortion.

In such states, a pregnant teen determined to avoid parental notice may have to choose either a trip to another state, an illegal abortion or a hearing before an unsympathetic judge.

A bill pending in the U.S. Senate would make it a crime for any adult to drive a pregnant teen across state lines to circumvent a parental-involvement law.

Nationwide, there are about 900,000 teen pregnancies a year, and roughly one-third of those are aborted. Both the teen pregnancy and teen abortion rates have dropped steadily over the past decade, but they remain higher than in most developed countries.

Free falling



STUART VILLANUEVA/The Battalion
James Taylor, a skydiving instructor at the Austin Skydiving Center, bails out from 10,000 feet above Lexington, Texas. Skydivers in free fall from this height reach speeds up to 120 mph before opening their chutes and floating safely to earth.

Bootleggers use hearing-impaired technology to record concerts

NEW YORK (AP) — A system designed to help the hearing-impaired at concerts has provided bootleggers with a new tool to make illegal live recordings of exceptional quality, according to the record industry.

This latest wrinkle in the multimillion-dollar bootlegging industry takes advantage of a federal law requiring arenas to offer patrons use of an assistive listening device (ALD).

"We know through criminal investigations and informants that this is a common practice," said Frank Creighton, senior vice president of anti-piracy at the Recording Industry Association of America.

Bootleggers can simply request an ALD headset, which provides a high-quality feed of a live show via a low-level FM frequency broadcast inside a facility.

The music pirates then steal the headset feed, giving them concert performances devoid of the usual bootleg problems such as random crowd noise or distortion, Creighton said.

"The quality is much higher than a typical bootleg," Creighton continued. "No question about it."

Bootleggers are using the devices provided for the hearing-impaired to record near-pristine versions of concerts by veterans like Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan plus a plethora of new acts.

"Every major act that's in the Billboard top 100 is getting bootlegged in some manner," Creighton says.

Advocates for the hearing impaired were appalled by the new pirating technique.

"Oh my goodness! What concerns me is if this becomes so prevalent that the service is dropped," said Mercy Coogan of Gallaudet University.

"The quality is much higher than a typical bootleg. No question about it."

— Frank Creighton
senior vice president of anti-piracy at the Recording Industry Association of America

at the Washington, D.C.-based college for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

"That could prohibit a whole lot of hard of hearing people from this very important mode of access."

Arenas are required to provide the ALDs under the federal Americans with Disability Act, which marked its 10th anniversary Wednesday.

Typical of the ALD bootlegs is an Aug. 22, 1999, Springsteen concert from Boston's Fleet Center — one of the most popular illegal recordings of the Boss' E Street Band reunion tour, according to Internet sites.

The three-CD collection is advertised as "soundboard quality," with various mentions that it was done via an ALD.

"If there (is) anybody who don't own a single boot, buy this," raved one bootleg buyer at a Springsteen site. "The sound is so good you'll think it's an official release!!!"

The ALD rip-offs were news to officials at several major concert venues from coast to coast, including the new Staples Center in Los Angeles and the First Union Center in Philadelphia.

"We have the devices, but I haven't heard this," said Ike Williams of the First Union Center in Philadelphia.

Creighton says that arena policing is generally left up to bands and their road crews; major groups, from the Allman Brothers to the Dixie Matthews Band, have encouraged their fans to tape and trade live performances.

The Recording Industry Association of America only becomes involved once the illegal material is manufactured and distributed, according to Creighton. The association says that hundreds of millions of dollars are lost annually through the various forms of bootlegging, and this new technique should add to that total.

Colombian rebels besiege police

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Leftist rebels attacking a police station in a mountain town claimed to have killed nearly two dozen officers, and authorities said they feared the worst Sunday as they struggled to deploy reinforcements.

Radio transmissions from the besieged police officers in the town of Arboleda were cut on Sunday morning, about 24 hours after the attack began.

The rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, told a local photojournalist who tried to enter Arboleda that they had killed 23 police officers.

Police said they could not confirm the report, but said it was possible that casualties are high among the 26 officers stationed in Arboleda.

The attack could be the bloodiest since the United States approved \$1.3 billion in aid to Colombia to battle leftist rebels and other armed groups involved in narcotics production. As a rebel offensive heats up, there are calls for the aid to be used for anti-guerrilla missions that are not directly related to drugs.

National police chief Gen. Ernesto Gilibert was at the airport in the provincial capital, Manizales, coordinating with the army and air force to get reinforcements to the town, Gutierrez said.

"We fear the worst," said Police Col. Norberto Pelaez,

the police commander in Caldas province, where Arboleda is located.

Low cloud cover in the mountainous region was paralyzing air support operations. The rebels prevented the local photographer, who was interviewed on national radio, from entering the town.

Gutierrez said it was unclear if U.S.-supplied Blackhawk combat helicopters, which provide security for planes fumigating drug-producing coca and poppy fields, would be used in the fighting in Arboleda if the weather cleared.

The Blackhawks can be used "to defend the police and military forces if they are under attack in a zone where there are anti-narcotics activities," Kamman was quoted as saying in an interview Saturday with ANCOL, the Colombian government's news agency.

However, Arboleda is not believed to be in a coca- or poppy-producing region, meaning their use to help the besieged police might violate U.S. policy.

The same issue came up in a similar attack mounted by the FARC on July 15 on the southwestern town of Roncesvalles. The rebels besieged the police station in the town, and after police ran out of ammunition, the rebels allegedly executed 13 of the officers.

Under the new U.S. aid, approved by President Clinton on July 13, Washington will provide 60 more helicopters, including Blackhawks and Hueys, to Colombian security forces.



News in Brief

Hostages freed in McDonald's robbery

GREENVILLE, S.C. (AP) — Three employees were taken hostage early Sunday during an attempted robbery at a McDonald's restaurant. One escaped and the others were freed hours later after the suspects' fathers talked the two men into surrendering.

One hostage was shot but was able to walk out of the restaurant, and another was sexually assaulted, said Police Chief Willie Johnson.

Police received a call at about 6 a.m. that someone was trying to rob the restaurant, Johnson said. One hostage escaped about two hours later, and, at one point, shots were fired inside the restaurant, Johnson said.

One suspect surrendered just after 10 a.m. and the second gave up about 30 minutes later, Johnson said. He identified the men as Michael Sheppard, 20, and Mario Baldwin, 21, both of Greenville. Both were arrested.

Johnson said their fathers had helped police talk them into surrendering. One of the hostages, identified as Eric Marshall, was in serious

California fires threaten homes

RIDGECREST, Calif. (AP) — A fire raging in the rugged Sierra Nevada swept through a tiny community on the remote Kern Plateau, destroying eight homes as it swelled to more than 60,000 acres Sunday.

"The last folks in there were the firefighters and they headed out just in time to get out of the fire's way," said Kern County Fire Department spokesperson Chuck Dickson.

The flames charred pine forest and brush as they spread from the Sequoia National Forest, gaining 10,000 acres overnight Saturday and threatening homes along the fire line, about 120 miles north of Los Angeles on Sunday.

Firefighters estimate it will take nearly two weeks of digging and burning fire lines to surround it, and there is no telling how much the fire will grow in the meantime, said U.S. Forest Service

spokesperson Geri Adams. The weather forecast for the area was for hotter and drier conditions combined with afternoon thunderstorms, Adams said, adding, "That wind won't help either."

The Sierra Nevada blaze was one of about 50 fires burning more than 488,000 acres across the nation Sunday, the National Fire Information Center reported. In the West, wildfires continued to burn in Montana, Nevada, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Washington, Arizona and New Mexico.

About 1,350 firefighters, with the help of nine helicopters and four air tankers, were fighting the blaze, which has cost more than \$3 million, Adams said. Eight firefighters have been injured since began July 22.

The fire was contained Sunday but damage to roads and utility lines are expected to keep the park closed at least two months.

The blaze was so hot, the fire road ties supporting the steel guardrails along the park's winding roads burned, and officials worried about erosion on the charred hills when the first heavy rain comes.

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