

Texas appeals court dismisses revenge porn law

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A Texas appeals court says a state law that punishes those who post intimate images from previous or current relationships online without consent is unconstitutional.

The 12th Court of Appeals in Tyler ruled Wednesday that the revenge porn law violates the U.S. Constitution by restricting expression based on the content of photographs and videos shared online. The court said that the law was vague and infringed on the rights of third parties who might unwittingly share intimate images.

The court also ordered a revenge porn charge to be dropped against Jordan Bartlett Jones. Court records show Jones challenged the law as unconstitutional while awaiting trial for sharing a naked photograph of a woman without consent.

The ruling blocks the law in northeast Texas counties under the 12th Court of Appeals.

The state prosecuting attorney's office plans to ask the court to reconsider its decision. If the appeals court denies the request, the office will ask the Court of Criminal Appeals to invalidate the ruling, said Stacey Soule, head of the agency.

Legislators passed the Relationship Privacy Act in 2015, making revenge porn a misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in jail and a \$4,000 fine.

The law was inspired by stories from people who said they had no legal recourse to pursue charges after learning that intimate images of themselves had been posted online.

"When I opened the website, I was completely horrified," victim Hollie Toups of Nederland told the Legislature in 2015. "There were hundreds of pictures of women, and one of the first ones that I saw was actually a photo of myself."

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