

Nonprofit groups say Islamic law ban protects women

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OKLAHOMA CITY - Four nonprofit groups are telling a federal judge that a ban on the use of Islamic law in Oklahoma courts helps protect women from underage marriage, honor killings, polygamy and marital rape.

In a friend-of-the-court legal brief, the groups said such practices exist in Islamic nations that are governed by Shariah law.

Voters approved the ban Nov. 2 when they passed State Question 755. U.S. District Judge Vicki Miles-LaGrange has temporarily blocked its implementation but will consider the issue again Monday in federal court in Oklahoma City.

The groups cited the case of a New Jersey Muslim man who was charged with raping his wife and used as his defense his religious beliefs that a wife must comply with her husband's sexual demands.

They said a trial judge ruled in the man's favor but was rebuked by an appellate court.

The Virginia-based nonprofit groups that filed the brief are the lobbying group U.S. Border Control, the U.S. Border Control Foundation, the Lincoln Institute for Research and Education, and the Conservative Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Muneer O. Awad, executive director of the Oklahoma Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, sued to stop the measure two days after the vote, saying it is unconstitutional because it singles out a particular religion for disfavored treatment.

State Question 755 bans state courts from considering Shariah or international law. State courts do not use Islamic law, but supporters of the measure said it was needed as a pre-emptive measure.

Awad said last week that Shariah law could never replace federal or state laws. But adoption of a constitutional amendment referencing Shariah law voices the state's official disapproval and condemnation of Islam, he said.

"And that raises constitutional issues on its own with respect to the government being able to approve or disapprove of religion," Awad said.

"It involves my standing as a Muslim in the political community."

The University of Oklahoma's Undergraduate Student Congress passed a resolution Tuesday stating that the passage of SQ 755 hurts OU's ability to function on the international stage and when

recruiting international students.

■ In addition, it says, Oklahoma is hurting itself economically by deterring businesses and international corporations from working with the university and the state as a whole.

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