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Criminalizing Animal Rights Activism Unconstitutional in Idaho

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The ruling could mean other states prohibiting undercover investigations into animal abuse are next.

A law criminalizing the recording of animal-rights abuses taking place at livestock operations in the U.S. state of Idaho was ruled unconstitutional on Monday.

A federal judge ruled Idaho's "ag-gag" law unconstitutional for violating First Amendment protections for free speech.

The ruling stated that "prohibiting undercover investigators or whistleblowers from recording an agricultural facility's operations inevitably suppresses a key type of speech because it limits the information that might later be published or broadcast."

Similar laws criminalizing secret investigations into farm operations are also in effect in the states of Montana, Utah, North Dakota, Missouri, Kansas and Iowa.

According to Leslie Brueckner, the senior attorney who served as co-counsel for the plaintiffs in the case, the ruling promises that these laws can be struck down in other states as well.

"This ruling is so clear, so definitive, so sweeping," Brueckner told ThinkProgress. "We couldn't ask for a better building block in terms of striking these laws down in other states."

Idaho's "ag-gag" law was implemented in 2014 after animal rights groups released undercover videos exposing animal rights violations at a state farm. Based on emails it obtained, the Intercept found that dairy industry lobbyists heavily influenced the legislation that was later introduced by lawmakers.