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Catholic Priest to Appeal Closure of Kirov Baby Box

By Howard Amos

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A Catholic priest in the city of Kirov will file a court appeal against the closure of a baby box by prosecutors, local news website Devyatka reported Tuesday.

The baby box — an incubator-type enclosure in which mothers can leave an unwanted newborn, anonymously and without legal repercussions — was reportedly opened at a religious center for the help of pregnant women on May 3, but closed a few days later under pressure from prosecutors.

"After consultations with lawyers we formulated our response to the warning from prosecutors and have turned to the Oktyabrsky District Court. We are now waiting for when they will set the first sitting," Father Grigory Zvolinsky was cited as saying by Devyatka.

Baby boxes have been introduced in Russia in recent years by charities and social groups in an effort to reduce infanticide rates, offering a possible alternative to mothers who would might otherwise seek an abortion. But the trend has come under fire from the authorities in recent months.

Pavel Astakhov, Russia children's rights ombudsman, said in March that he had written to prosecutors with a request to investigate baby boxes. "A box for a child contradicts not only a series of Russian laws but also moral principles," Astakhov was quoted as saying at the time by news agency TASS.

The only baby box in the city of Yekaterinburg near the Ural Mountains was formally checked last week by prosecutors and local health officials, according to local media reports.

Baby boxes were first installed in Russia by the charity Cradle of Hope in 2011, and the group claims that a total of 31 newborns have been saved by its 21 baby boxes in 11 Russian regions since then. There are no baby boxes in Moscow or St. Petersburg.

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