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POLITICS

Ohio House expected to pass bans on transgender student athletes, medical care for kids

2 bills up for House votes today would ban transgender females from women's sports, ban transgender medical care for children, and report students who question their sexual identity in school.



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How Ohio's LGBTQ children experience life at school, what sports they play, and the kinds of medical care they can access would change if two pieces of Republican legislation expected to pass the House on Wednesday become law.

Known as House Bills 8 and 68, these proposed laws would require schools to notify parents before sexual orientation or identity is discussed, immediately report students who question those identities, ban transgender girls from playing on female sports teams in high school and college and prohibit doctors from prescribing hormones, puberty blockers or gender reassignment surgery before age 18.

"I think it's time to have a vote on the full House floor," House Speaker Jason Stephens, R-Kitts Hill, said, noting that variations on these bills have been debated around the statehouse for years.

Democrats, however, say the process of bringing these specific bills forward has been rushed, and those impacted most weren't given enough time to speak.

Parental rights

House Bill 8 is called the Parents Right To Know Act, and its Republican sponsors say the legislation is about getting parents more involved in their children's education.

Ohio law already requires school districts to notify parents before teaching sex education, but HB 8 would expand that rule to include "sexuality content," defined "as any oral or written instruction, presentation, image, or description of sexual concepts or gender ideology."

"The intent is not to exclude or prohibit that kind of instruction," Rep. Adam Bird, R-New Richmond, said earlier this month. "The intent is to let parents know that kind of teaching is coming. ... It's about parent notification."

But Democrats say not all parents are good parents, and they questioned how much notification parents should receive, especially when it came to the part of the bill that mandated school officials tell parents when children question their sexual orientation or gender identity.

"I'm worried that this amendment is not so much about the content...but more so an outing of students when they don't fit the mold," Rep. Jessica Miranda, D-Forest Park, said during a committee hearing.

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House Democrats wanted teachers to have the discretion to withhold information in those situations, and the original bill gave it to them with the caveat that religion could not be the only reason. But Republicans cut that from the final version.

Transgender medical care and women's sports

Hb 68 originally dealt with what types of medical care transgender minors should be able to access, but the bill had a ban on transgender girls playing on female sports teams added to it last week.

More: Ohio House panel OKs bill to ban transgender girls in women's sports, gender surgery for kids

If passed, HB 68 would make it illegal for Ohio doctors to provide anything beyond talk therapy for all transgender minors – even those on hormones and puberty blockers. Families wishing to continue those treatments would have to leave the state.

Transgender children who remained in Ohio would be screened for "comorbidities that may be influencing the minor's gender-related condition," like depression, anxiety, sexual abuse and autism during gender dysmorphia therapy. And no surgical interventions would be permitted.

"Minors do not have the ability to provide informed consent to any of these dangerous procedures," bill sponsor Gary Click, R-Vickery, said.

Parents of transgender children strongly disagreed during the committee process, saying the government should not be able to decide what is "medically appropriate for our kids."

When it came to transgender student-athletes, HB 68 says the genitalia a child is born with determines what sports teams they can play on in high school and college. Currently, the Ohio High School Athletic Association allows transgender girls to join female teams if they submit bloodwork and proof of being on hormone therapy for at least one year.

The bill doesn't specify how an athlete's gender would be verified if called into question, but it would allow athletes and their families to sue if they believed they lost an opportunity because of a transgender athlete.

This story will be updated Wednesday. The Ohio House session is set to start at 2 p.m.

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