

The New Hampshire House of Representatives

Commentary: Rights, lives, and health of LGBTQ individuals and families in NH are under threat

***Online House of Representatives Testimony Submissions, February 14, 2024, 4:55 a.m.
Following Submitted by Borja Alvarez de Toledo:***

“This legislative session, lawmakers have introduced more than 30 harmful bills seeking to infringe on LGBTQ+ rights.”

Six short years ago, the New Hampshire Legislature updated state nondiscrimination law to explicitly protect transgender people in employment, housing, and public spaces, including restrooms. The bill had bipartisan support from both state representatives and state senators – and was signed into law by Gov. Chris Sununu. A year later, another law was passed extending these protections to public schools.

Today, the debate in the Legislature has taken a drastic turn, endangering the rights, lives, and health of LGBTQ+ individuals and families in the Granite State.

This legislative session, lawmakers have introduced more than 30 harmful bills seeking to infringe on LGBTQ+ rights. Several of these bills would force schools to “out” students to their parents (Senate Bill 341); others would restrict the health care available to transgender youth (House Bill 619). Some bills would prohibit transgender youth from playing on sports teams (Senate Bill 524); others would ban all transgender individuals from using the bathroom that aligns with their identity (House Bill 396).

Each of these bills seeks to infringe in some manner on the rights, lives, and health of LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS. More broadly, this onslaught of harmful bills tears at the very fabric of the Granite State – broadcasting to our LGBTQ+ community members that they are not welcome here.

We write today on behalf of a broad group of health care providers, civil rights organizations, and advocacy groups. These groups include New Futures, Waypoint, NAMI New Hampshire, the N.H. Hospital Association, the N.H. Community Behavioral Health Association, Bi-State Primary Care Association, the N.H. Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, ACLU of New Hampshire, 603 Equality, Seacoast Outright, and others.

For one Bristol family, gender-affirming care has been life-changing and life-saving. Two years ago, their teenager was withdrawn and anxious, self-harming, and speaking with friends about suicidal thoughts. Since receiving gender-affirming care, their child has blossomed into a happy teenager who is loved and accepted by friends and family and routinely uses her preferred name and pronouns at school.

This teenager is still here – now happy and thriving. The harmful legislation proposed this session jeopardizes the lives and happiness of Granite Staters, including this child.

The collective targeting of LGBTQ+ rights in our state aligns with the quick-spreading national attack on transgender young people. Outside national organizations are working to bring discriminatory practices to New Hampshire, mirroring harmful legislation that has passed in other parts of the country.

There is no question that the consequences of passing even just one of these bills would have severe impacts on mental health. Recent research conducted by The Trevor Project found that legislative attacks negatively impact the well-being of 80 percent of LGBTQ+ youth. In New Hampshire, 39 percent of LGBTQ+ youth reported seriously considering suicide in the past year. Of Granite State LGBTQ+ youth who wanted mental health care in the past year, 52 percent were unable to access it – for some, because they were afraid to talk about their concerns with someone else or did not want to have to get permission from their parents/caregivers.

One big question left unanswered is how legislators plan to enforce the bans proposed in harmful legislation. Several of the bills put New Hampshire teachers, coaches, and administrators in the position of policing their students – equating to a gross invasion of privacy. Current New Hampshire law allows transgender individuals to update the information on their birth certificate to align with their identity – as such, providing a birth certificate would not verify a “biological sex” requirement.

We hope our elected representatives will focus on improving life in the Granite State for families, teachers, and youth. Consistently rejecting these harmful bills will send the message that LGBTQ+ young people, and all those who love them, are welcome in New Hampshire.

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