

Florida Bill Aims to Limit Curriculum on Sexual Orientation and Gender

Florida state lawmakers advanced a new measure on Jan. 20 which would prohibit any discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in public school classrooms from kindergarten into middle school.

WFLA-TV reports the proposed bill would be based on the Parents' Bill of Rights passed by the state legislature in 2021. House Bill 1557 and companion Senate Bill 1834, would require schools to "adopt procedures for notifying" parents if there is a change in their students' welfare.

State Rep. Joe Harding (R-Williston) proposed the bill in the state House. State Sen. Dennis Baxley (R-Ocala) sponsored the Senate version. The television station reported the text of the bills is identical.

"A school district may not encourage classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in primary grade levels or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students," the proposed legislation reads.

According to WFLA-TV, Harding told a House committee hearing that his measure was focused on giving parents more protections to decide how they raise their children.

The lawmaker said the measure would cover "situations where a teacher is encouraging or initiating conversations through a procedure the school is doing." He said the bill would not bar discussions in a blanket method, but did say the parents of students should be made aware or "alerted" about the discussions.

“Get the parents involved, when you make a change to how the student is treated,” Harding said.

In addition, the bill would prohibit “a school district from adopting procedures or student support forms that require school district personnel to withhold from a parent specified information or that encourage or have the effect of encouraging a student to withhold from a parent such information; providing an exception; prohibiting school district personnel from discouraging or prohibiting parental notification and involvement in critical decisions affecting a student’s mental, emotional, or physical well-being.”

Harding said the proposed measure would prevent school districts from creating curricula or policies that encourage teachers to discuss LGBTQ+ topics in classrooms, according to WFLA.

The Republican lawmaker added it would not prevent the teaching of LGBTQ+ history in schools, but it would prevent educators from starting those discussions through questionnaires or events. The bill focuses on “specific curriculum or coursework” where the student is required to participate in a discussion about LGBTQ+ topics.

“What we don’t want is the school district to try take on the role of being the parent, because they’re not, that’s the role of the parent,” Harding said. “I would argue that on the opposite, this encourages the parent to be the one having this conversation, not the government.”

The legislation drew harsh criticism from LGBTQ+ advocates, who slammed the bill for prohibiting discussion in elementary schools about gender identity and sexual orientation. {eo}

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