

# Legislature sends Gov. DeWine bill combining bans on transgender sports and health care

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COLUMBUS, Ohio – The Ohio General Assembly passed a bill Wednesday that would prohibit minors from receiving gender-affirming care and transgender females from playing girls' and women's sports.

[House Bill 68](#) passed in the Senate 24 to 8, along party lines, except for Sen. Nathan Manning, a North Ridgeville Republican, who voted “no.”

The bill then returned to the House, where it had to vote on whether to concur with changes made to HB 68 in the Senate. The House OK'd the changes also largely along party lines, 61 to 27.

HB 68 now heads to Gov. Mike DeWine, who previously said he doesn't support sports bans because athletic associations already have rules in place for transgender athletes. On Wednesday, [when questioned by a reporter](#), he was noncommittal about whether he would sign or veto the bill, saying he hadn't seen the amendments yet.

The bill is a blow to Ohio's LGBTQ community, which showed up in droves to testify against it. They protested in the halls of the Ohio Statehouse, outside of the chambers of the Ohio Senate and House, and could be heard by lawmakers, as they were debating the bill.

During testimony, many revealed private details about their medical care, some of which was uncomfortable for them to describe, in an attempt to educate and win the empathy of lawmakers.

Transgender people only make up 1% to 2% of the U.S. population. [Estimates in Ohio](#) put the number of transgender people at under 1% of the state's population. Legislation that the transgender community views as harmful has been increasingly passed throughout the U.S. If Gov. Mike DeWine signs HB 68, Ohio will become

the [24th state since 2020](#) to enact a sports ban and [the 23rd state](#) to enact a minor medical care ban.

Some of the last-minute changes made to HB 68 in the Ohio Senate came on the request of the Ohio Children's Hospital Association, said Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman, a Lima Republican. Many children's hospitals run gender clinics and have fought the bill. (Surgical sex changes in children are not routine, but are assessed on a case-by-case basis but generally doesn't occur, [according to guidance from the American Psychological Association](#).)

While sex-change surgeries and hormones have always been banned in the bill, it was unclear whether counseling services were.

The bill now says that parents or guardians must consent to mental health treatment of a gender-related condition. Mental health professionals cannot diagnose a child with gender dysphoria without looking at other comorbidities – including depression, anxiety, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder – and potential physical, sexual, mental and emotional abuse and other possible trauma.

From the Senate floor, Sen. Kristina Roegner, a Hudson Republican, says trans Ohioans deserve dignity and community.

"What they do not deserve is fads, ideology and certainly not grotesquely optimistic, false promises that are not supported by science," she said.

Earlier Wednesday, before HB 68 passed out of committee, state Sen. Paula Hicks-Hudson, a Toledo Democrat who opposed the bill, addressed the transgender Ohioans in the committee room.

"We appreciate you coming to express your positions," she said. "Some of us heard you, and I just urge you to not give up because the work will continue. There are things that can be done in order to ensure that all Ohioans are treated with dignity and respect. We understand that our young people have so many different types of trials and trauma that they have to deal with. And unfortunately, this legislature is going to add an additional trauma to that. For that, I apologize. But I'm just saying, the battle is not over."

She encouraged Ohioans to exercise their right to vote to "make sure that Ohio is the Ohio that it has always been and not what it is becoming."

Public polls of Ohio registered voters from last summer and last autumn found that [majorities disagreed with letting transgender girls who use hormones play on female teams, and opposed letting medical professionals provide care for minors' gender transitions.](#)

The LGBTQ community has said that despite the polls, attitudes are shifting, as more transgender people are sharing their stories and people understand the medical science.

Republicans could be harnessing the public's unease with transgender rights ahead of the 2024 presidential election.

The vast majority of people who testified on HB 68 opposed it.

Huffman, the president of the Ohio Senate, said lawmakers weren't too swayed by the testimony.

"So we don't make laws just for the hundreds of people that come and testify," he said. "We make laws for over 11 million people."

But state Sen. Nickie Antonio, a Lakewood Democrat who is the only openly gay member of the General Assembly, noted that Ohioans have told lawmakers directly at the Statehouse and during elections, including on the abortion rights amendment passed in November, that they are not on board with their view of social issues.

"I think Ohioans should be puzzled why they've not been listened to," said Antonio, the leader of the Democrats in the Senate. "They have told us twice in the past recent months, that they don't want the government interfering in their health care. And here we are, again, not only interfering in their health care, we're usurping the ability of parents to make decisions."

HB 68 prohibits gender-affirming care of minors, even if their parents consent to it.

Antonio also questioned why a bill that affects such a small number of the state's residents is such a priority that it was passed on the last expected session day of the year.

The LGBTQ community now plans to reach out to Gov. Mike DeWine about vetoing the bill. [DeWine has previously said](#) he opposes trans sports bans, since athletic associations such as the Ohio High School Athletic Association have devised their own policies that he said are working.

“We have definitely had actual families who would be affected by this legislation reach out and have conversations with his office,” said Maria Bruno, public policy director for Equality Ohio. “I hope that he will recognize the harm with these bills, be able to show a backbone and actually veto it. Again, though, it feels very much like a Hail Mary because these partisan politics are taking such a front row seat in this legislative decision.”

*Jeremy Pelzer and Andrew Tobias contributed to this report.*