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Bathroom bill flushed out of Tennessee legislature

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The controversial bill that would require public school students and colleges to use the restroom matching their gender at birth failed without debate Wednesday, March 22, in the Senate Education Committee.

Although the bill was reintroduced from last year by Mt. Juliet Republican Sen. Mae Beavers, it failed to receive a motion from senators, killing the bill for the year as legislators will not be able to reintroduce it until the next legislative session.

Opponents of the bill from the American Civil Liberties Union and LGBT Chamber of Commerce silently held signs in protest while

the committee was in session, believing the bill discriminates against the LGBT community and violates civil rights laws.

Jeff Gallagher, sophomore in English and transgender student, voiced his opinions on bathroom bills.

"I'm pissed, and I just want to piss," Gallagher said. "I know a lot of trans-people who look like the gender they identify as, and if they were forced to go into their (birth-assigned) bathroom that would just be really sad ... And I feel uncomfortable in the girls' bathroom because I'm like, 'I'm not one of you. I don't belong here, but I have to be here because the law is such that I have to be here.'"

While Gallagher has found college to be an easier place to be a transgender student than high school, he says there would be negative effects on public school students if it were implemented.

"I think for younger trans people who are just now discovering who they are and just now dis-

covering where they fit in the world, coming into a very hostile (environment) ... that's going to be really, really hard for a lot of them," Gallagher said.

Since President Donald Trump's executive orders in February repealed former President Barack Obama's protections on transgender students, Tennessee government officials who originally backed the legislation, like Republican Lt. Gov. Randy McNally, have stated the need for a bathroom bill is no longer necessary.

The proposed legislation has been the subject of much debate and protest at both local and national levels since its conception.

In April, protesters interrupted Beavers and Rep. Mark Pody (R-Lebanon), who sponsored the bill in the House, during a press conference on the legislation and followed them to their offices in the Capitol afterwards.

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Tennessee's bathroom bill is similar to one passed by North Carolinian legislators in March 2016. After North Carolina passed the bill, the state received national attention with many boycotting travel, organizations moving athletic competitions and businesses divesting from the state. Other states have introduced the bill, but none have successfully passed it. Jonathan Reddington, sophomore in computer science, says he sees bathroom bills as immature.

"Most of them don't strike me as easily enforceable, and the basis for most of them seems to be, 'I feel uncomfortable about something; therefore, it should be banned. It should be not allowed because it makes me uncomfortable,' which is not okay in my book," Reddington said. "Forcing others to conform to you doesn't strike me as very mature."

The Supreme Court has not decided whether anti-discrimination laws applied to school transgender bathroom cases are constitutional. When a case arguing whether a Virginia transgender student could use the school bathroom corresponding with his gender identity, the Supreme Court justices chose to send the case back to a lower court for further consideration.

While the fate of this year's version of the bathroom bill has been decided, the future of it is still uncertain.

"I'm glad that it did get killed for now," Gallagher said. "I don't think it's going to stay killed since this is Tennessee, and this is a very Republican area."

BATHROOM BILL TIMELINE

March 23, 2016

North Carolina passes Public facilities Privacy and Security Act that requires individuals to use government restrooms corresponding to their sex on birth certificates.

April 6, 2016

A Tennessee House of Representatives education committee passes a bill to require students at public schools to use the restroom corresponding to their sex at birth but then tables it to be decided in the next year.

May 13, 2016

The Obama administration sends a letter to public school districts telling them to allow transgenders to use the restroom that corresponds to their gender identity.

October 28, 2016

The U.S. Supreme Court says it will hear a case from a Virginia transgender student trying to use the restroom of his defined gender at a public school.

February 22, 2017

The Trump administration sends a letter to public schools that revokes the Obama administration's protections given in May 2016 on the belief that the previous administration did not explain how the protections involved Title IX, among other reasons.

March 22, 2017

The Tennessee Senate Education Committee kills a bill that would require transgender students to use the bathroom matching their sex at birth.

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