



# KENTUCKY GOP LAWMAKERS VOTE TO PROTECT CONVERSION THERAPY - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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*The exterior of the Kentucky Capitol is viewed April 7, 2021, in Frankfort, Ky. State Rep*

Kentucky's Republican lawmakers have passed a measure to protect conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ youths as part of a bill that also would outlaw the use of Medicaid funds to pay for gender-affirming health care for transgender Kentucky residents.

The House vote occurred late Friday, less than an hour before the midnight deadline for the GOP-supermajority legislature to pass bills and retain its ability to override gubernatorial vetoes. The bill passed after the Senate version that prohibited the use of Medicaid was accepted by the House.

Conversion therapy is the scientifically discredited practice of using therapy to "convert" LGBTQ+ people to heterosexuality or traditional gender expectations.

GOP lawmakers voted to remove restrictions that Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear placed on the practice last year. He banned spending tax dollars to pay for the practice on minors, saying his executive order was needed to protect children. The order directed licensing boards to consider adopting strong policies disciplining someone found to have practiced conversion therapy on minors.

The measure voted on Friday, and denounced by Beshear, cleared both chambers by veto-proof margins. Lawmakers will take up vetoes while wrapping up this year's session in late March.

Chris Hartman, executive director of the Fairness Campaign, a Kentucky-based LGBTQ+ advocacy group, called it one of the most "shameful" bills in Kentucky history.

Democratic Rep. Lisa Willner condemned conversion therapy as "discredited, dangerous, suicide-promoting practices."

David Walls, executive director of The Family Foundation, a socially conservative group, called it a needed pushback against Beshear's executive action, which Walls called an attack on free speech and religious freedom.

Knowing they had the votes for passage, Republican House members said little about the bill Friday night. Its lead sponsor, GOP Rep. David Hale, has said families should have access to the mental health care of their choice, and said his bill would protect mental health

care professionals, institutions and ordained ministries from discrimination when providing counseling services.

The Kentucky debate comes amid the [national battle](#) over [LGBTQ+ rights](#). The [Supreme Court](#) will use a recent case from Colorado to decide whether state and local governments can enforce laws banning conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ children.

Beshear, who is widely seen as a potential contender for the White House in 2028, last Thursday lambasted the bill meant to nullify his action against conversion therapy.

“Conversion therapy has been discredited by every major medical organization that’s looked at it,” the governor said. “It significantly increases the chances of suicide amongst our LGBTQ+ youth. It is equivalent of torture, and we should not be allowing it to happen here in the commonwealth. Those are children of God that deserve our protection.”

On the Medicaid part of the bill, Beshear said medical decisions should be left up to medical experts.

“We don’t determine someone’s health care based on the politics of the day,” he said.

House Republicans on Friday also gave final passage to a bill targeting the few dozen transgender people who are incarcerated in Kentucky. The measure would ban them from accessing gender-affirming health care. That bill was also sent to the governor.

The bill's supporters have said it makes a clear distinction between essential medical treatments and elective procedures. Inmates will continue receiving medical care for legitimate conditions, they said, but the state will not fund what they called elective gender transition treatments.

“The idea that state taxpayers should be footing the bill for gender transition treatments of any individual, but especially those who have perpetrated harm against our commonwealth, is outrageous,” Walls said.

Hartman said the denial of prescribed medications to transgender inmates, under the guise of saving tax dollars, is cruel and unconstitutional.

In a floor speech late Friday summing up the House action, Democratic Rep. Sarah Stalker said lawmakers should have used the time on core issues like jobs, health care, public education and affordable housing instead of “continuing to go after such small populations of individuals who are already vulnerable.”

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Associated Press writer Dylan Lovan in Louisville, Kentucky, contributed to this report.