

Tennessee governor signs anti-transgender and anti-drag bills

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Tennessee Governor Bill Lee signed into law March 2 a bill criminalizing gender affirming care (i.e., surgeries and hormone treatments for transgender youth) as child abuse, as well as a law banning drag performances on public property.

The law banning gender affirming treatments prohibits doctors from providing any health care to minors in order “to identify with, or live as, a purported identity inconsistent with the minor’s sex,” that is, the minor’s sex assigned at birth. The law bans the use of puberty blockers and hormone treatments to treat gender dysphoria’s underlying cause, but does not ban the drugs’ use for other treatments.

As of last June over a dozen states were implementing or considering such laws, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

The World Health Organization, American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and American Psychiatric Association all endorse gender-affirming care as an effective treatment for gender dysphoria among minors. There isn’t any scientific basis for the attack on gender-affirming care, only a religious one, which is entirely unconstitutional.

The ban will force children who take the medication to stop doing so by March 31, 2024.

The bill was mostly approved along party lines, with the exception of the Tennessee House, where three right-wing Democrats voted for the legislation, including Representative Antonio Parkinson (D-Memphis). Parkinson attempted to put the blame on voters, claiming, “My constituents didn’t want it. It’s pretty simple, pretty straightforward. My constituents were like, ‘let these children be children.’ Let them grow up and make that adult decision when they become adults.”

The ban on drag is part and parcel of the

demonization of trans people, with the law aiming at legitimizing the far-right claim that drag queens are “grooming” children. At least seven other states are considering similar bans on drag performances, according to PEN America.

Both pieces of legislation followed right-wing propaganda revolving around Vanderbilt Medical Center, where far-right commentators falsely claimed that doctors were performing genital surgeries on minors.

Democrats have played a pernicious role in the passage of anti-trans legislation, with Minority Leader Karen Camper (D-Memphis) having voted “present” on a bill (then House Bill 0003/ Senate Bill 228) that banned transgender girls from participating in team sports consistent with their gender identity, as part of what has been dubbed the “Slate of Hate” legislation in 2021.

Democratic State Representatives Jesse Chism, London Lamar, Sam McKenzie, and Johnny Shaw were silent as the latest bill progressed through the Tennessee House. Rep. Lamar, D-Memphis, justified her vote of “present” by claiming that “strong science” supported her decision.

Trans students have a disproportionately high suicide attempt rate and experience high rates of harassment at schools compared to their peers. According to a 2019 CDC study, 27 percent of high school trans students feel unsafe at school or traveling to or from it, and 35 percent are bullied, with the same percent attempting suicide, about 15 percent and 26 percent more than the general student population, respectively. The 2021 legislation served to further demonize trans youth and cut a path for the current law which outright bans gender-affirming treatment.

If anything, the science proves that anti-trans laws are

detrimental to the well-being of the youth far-right lawmakers claim to be protecting. The law isn't concerned at all with the wellbeing of students who identify as trans, who will face further discrimination and mental anguish as a result of a lack of access to treatments.

In fact, as demonstrated in other states like Texas, where the Texas attorney general requested the drawing up of a list of transgender residents, the far-right has much more sinister plans for transgender people. The targeting of minority segments of the population such as trans athletes, and then trans youth, has nothing to do with maintaining "fairness" in sports or of protecting transgender identifying children's wellbeing from supposedly dangerous procedures or medications. It forms a pattern which matches previous patterns of demonization of minorities that typically precede more general attacks on the democratic rights of the working class.

This tactic was used by the Nazis in Germany, mobilizing backward segments of the petty bourgeoisie (mostly petty shopkeepers, doctors, professors, white collar laborers) with propaganda scapegoating minorities, including gays, disabled people, gypsies and Jews, with the ultimate goal of destroying the socialist labor movement in Germany.

There was a distinct echo of this at the Conservative Political Action Conference, a national Republican gathering in Maryland, over the weekend. One speaker remarked to applause, "there can be no middle way in dealing with transgenderism. ... Transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely." A similar note of anti-trans hysteria was sounded by Donald Trump in his keynote speech.

The contemporary far right in Germany, the AfD, has demonized immigrants and the federal government has set up detention camps, with the complicity of the ruling parties, as have both Democratic and Republican administrations along the US-Mexico border.

The targeting of minorities is a well-known, right-wing tactic used to ramp up a toxic atmosphere of hysteria and hatred aimed at inflaming the most backward sentiments of the population to justify the most ruthless attacks against the democratic rights of the working class.

All class conscious workers must oppose these attacks. This opposition must be on a socialist basis

independent of and hostile to the ruling class and its political representatives, including the Democratic Party and its pseudo-left satellites, who have demonstrated their refusal to defend democratic rights.



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