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New bill to guarantee health care access to transgender foster children

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SAN DIEGO (KUSI) — Transgender foster children would be guaranteed access to health care specific to their unique needs under a bill announced Monday by San Diego Assemblyman Todd Gloria.

The Democrat's bill would amend the list of foster youth rights to include "access to gender-affirming health care and gender-affirming behavioral health services," such as counseling to cope with gender identity issues or gender confirmation surgery.

That list includes such freedoms as accessing the religious services of their choice, attending court hearings, having private space and being placed in the custody of people who have received training on providing adequate care to LGBTQ youth.

"We know that transgender and gender nonconforming youth are at much higher risk for developing serious negative health conditions. This is especially true for those youth in our foster care system," Gloria said. "AB 2119 affirms the right of foster youth to be able to access health services reflective of their gender identity — meaning these children can grow up safe, healthy, and be exactly who they are meant to be."

The bill would require county health and human services agencies to ensure that appropriate health care is available to foster youth when they themselves or their caregivers or advocates request it.

LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the foster care system. Among them are those who are transgender (people whose assigned gender at birth does not correspond to their identity) and gender nonconforming (people whose gender identities fall outside the male-female binary).

In Los Angeles County, for example, 19 percent of foster youth identify as LGBTQ — that's 1.5 to 2 times the number of people in the general population who identify as such. Among those foster kids, 5 percent identify as transgender and 11 percent as gender nonconforming, according to a study by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law.

Some 13 percent of LGBTQ foster youth in the study reported being treated poorly while in the system compared to less than 6 percent of non-LGBTQ foster youth.

"This bill addresses a critical public health crisis in California: lack of access to medically necessary primary care for transgender and gender non-conforming youth in foster care," said Dr. Johanna Olson Kennedy, medical director of the Center for Transyouth Health and

Development at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. "These youth need and deserve the same access to health care guaranteed to all youth in out-of-home care, and this legislation will promote the health and well-being of some of the state's most vulnerable young people."

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