

# Florida Gov. DeSantis signs bills targeting drag shows, trans rights and care for transgender children

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed bills Wednesday that ban gender-affirming care for minors, target drag shows, restrict discussion of “preferred pronouns” in schools and force people to use certain bathrooms.

DeSantis has made anti-LGBTQ+ legislation a large part of his agenda as he prepares to seek the Republican presidential nomination. He signed the bills in front of a cheering crowd at the evangelical Cambridge Christian School in Tampa. The ceremony had a campaign-like feel, with DeSantis tossing Sharpies to a crowd, as opposed to when he privately signed measures on abortion and gun rights.

Democrats opposed the bills and LGBTQ+ rallies were held at the Capitol during the session that ended two weeks ago, but Republicans have a super-majority in both chambers and easily approved the bills for DeSantis’ signature.

“It’s kind of sad that we even have some of these discussions,” DeSantis told the crowd, standing behind a lectern with a sign reading “Let Kids Be Kids.”

DeSantis presented a narrative that expert panels in the nation’s major medical associations have said is false, such as the idea that children are routinely being “mutilated.” While he said he is protecting parents rights, his opponents say he’s denying the rights of parents with transgender kids.

“They have cloaked themselves in being the party of less government and parental rights, and what we’re seeing now is the total opposite,” said Democratic state Sen. Shevrin Jones, who is gay. “Every other parent has the right to raise their child the way that they want to as long as your child is not gay, trans, bisexual. That’s freedom for some parents but not for all parents.”

The gender care law also bans the use of state money for gender-affirming care and places new restrictions on adults seeking treatment.

Transgender medical treatment for children and teens is increasingly under attack in many states and has lately been subject to restrictions or outright bans. But it has been available in the United States for more than a decade and is endorsed by major medical associations as appropriate care for people diagnosed with gender dysphoria. Their guidelines generally prevent surgery for minors.

Treatment typically begins with an evaluation for the distress caused when gender identity doesn’t match a person’s assigned sex. With parent consent, persistent dysphoria can be treated with hormones, but typically not until age 16. The guidelines also say surgery should be reserved for people 18 and older.

But DeSantis spoke to applause at the bill-signing.

“We never did this through all of human history until like, what, two weeks ago? Now this is something? They’re having third graders declare pronouns? We’re not doing the pronoun Olympics in Florida,” DeSantis said.

The gender-affirming care ban and the law targeting drag shows go into effect immediately. The

bathroom restrictions and the law banning schools from forcing children to “provide his or her preferred personal title or pronouns” take effect July 1.

Jones said the governor’s choice of venue displayed the unpopularity of his campaign platform.

“If he’s so confident in his policies, don’t go hiding behind signing the bills at a Christian school or place where you’re more prone to get praise for your bigotry,” Jones said. “Do it out in the community.”

Republic Rep. Randy Fine, who sponsored the ban on gender-affirming care for minors, invoked his religion to defend the state’s actions.

“God does not make mistakes with our children,” Fine said.

Jones called Fine’s take on the Bible disingenuous.

“For anyone to use scripture in the same breath as you are being discriminatory and hateful towards a community of people, it don’t work like that,” Jones said. “You can’t take a book that was built on love and turn it around and fit your narrative.”