

U.S. court strikes down Florida transgender health rule

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June 21 (Reuters) - A U.S. judge on Wednesday struck down a Florida rule and a statute that banned state Medicaid payments for transgender healthcare, marking the second defeat in two weeks for anti-transgender legislation in the state. U.S. District Judge Robert Hinkle declared the state's practices invalid, saying they violated the constitutional right to equal protection under the 14th amendment in addition to violating the federal Medicaid statute and the Affordable Care Act's prohibition of sex discrimination.

The injunction was expected after [Hinkle on June 6 partially blocked](#) Florida from enforcing its recent ban on people under 18 receiving gender-affirming care such as puberty blockers and hormone therapy. U.S. district court judges elsewhere have blocked state laws banning gender-affirming care in Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana and Oklahoma.

Republican lawmakers introduced more than 500 bills restricting LGBTQ rights this past legislative year, passing [more than 70](#), according to Human Rights Campaign. [Twenty states](#) have passed laws banning gender-affirming care for minors.

Sponsors of the laws say they want to protect children who are being misled by parents and doctors and might regret their gender transition.

The AHCA had approved Medicaid payments for the plaintiffs, but in 2022 the executive office of Governor Ron DeSantis ordered the AHCA to conduct a new analysis and reversed course. The AHCA "retained only consultants known in advance for their staunch opposition to gender-affirming care," the judge found. "The new ... process was, from the outset, a biased effort to justify a predetermined outcome, not a fair analysis of the evidence," the judge said.

DeSantis is running for the Republican nomination for president and has promoted his record of aggressively fighting progressive policies, including LGBTQ rights.

Hinkle in his [54-page ruling](#) said "many people with this view tend to disapprove all things transgender and so oppose medical care that supports a person's transgender existence."

"The elephant in the room should be noted at the outset. Gender identity is real. The record makes this clear," the judge wrote after a two-week trial.

The plaintiffs were two transgender adults, August Dekker and Brit Rothstein, and two transgender minors who filed under pseudonyms.

The defendants were the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) and its secretary, Jason Weida, who did not respond to an after-hours request for comment.