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Group vows 'massive resistance' to retooled McCormick transgender bathroom bill

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NASHVILLE — For just a little while Wednesday, it appeared that Rep. Gerald McCormick was giving up on a controversial bill the Chattanooga Republican introduced that resurrects Tennessee's transgender school bathroom controversy.

McCormick moved on the floor to withdraw the measure, drawing attention from both Democrats and LGBT advocates who had criticized the measure that would have required the state attorney general to defend school policies from legal challenge or have the state pay their legal costs.

But no, the issue is not going away, McCormick said in an interview, adding he plans to introduce a re-tooled version.

"We got another one coming in behind it which should be a little clearer," McCormick said, adding sarcastically that "plus, I wanted to give the Democrats time to introduce their own legislation since they're so opposed to this and in favor of men being in little girls' bathrooms."

McCormick said he believes the new wording "is a little bit better in terms of just giving the locals common-sense discretion to take care of this problem on their own without lawyers from New York or California coming in and telling some little rural county what to do in their bathrooms."

The original bill required the state provide legal defense or funding for it to school districts and officials facing legal action over policies "designed to protect the privacy of students from exposure to others of the opposite biological sex."

It addresses restrooms, locker rooms or other facilities "where students may be in various states of undress."

Chris Sanders, executive director of the Tennessee Equality Project, a statewide LGBT advocacy group, said he had been "glad" McCormick withdrew the original bill and added "I would encourage him to look at why it's hard to run those bills — because it affects people.

"There's going to be a cost, there's going to be a legal challenge, obviously. And there's the risk of it interfering with federal funds. And I think any version of a bathroom bill is going to run into those kinds of things."

But Sanders said the Chattanooga lawmaker "is also going to encounter massive citizen

resistance."

More than 700 Tennesseans flooded McCormick with emails "telling him to withdraw the bill he ran," Sanders said. "And he's going to get that again from all over the state if he runs another one. It's going to be a lot of work to run this bill. I would hope that he will reconsider."

McCormick said last week the bill was brought to him by David Fowler, a former state senator from Signal Mountain who as an attorney now heads the socially conservative Family Action Council of Tennessee.

Meanwhile, action on two controversial bills left over from the 2017 legislative session has been delayed because original sponsors have departed from the House and Senate.

One defines marriage as being between a man and a woman and directs state officials to ignore the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark Obergefell ruling in 2015 that effectively legalized same-sex marriage.

The other is the so-called "fetal heartbeat" bill, which seeks to prohibit an abortion once a fetal heartbeat is detected.

Both bills are getting new sponsors.

<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/local/story/2018/jan/18/lgbt-advocacy-grovows-renewed-massive-resista/461531/>