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These Are the Worst Anti-LGBT Bills Planned for 2018

From state-level bans on municipalities passing LGBT protections to bills that allow for anti-LGBT discrimination in child services, this homophobia could soon be enshrined in law.

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2015 was the year of Indiana's [anti-LGBT "religious freedom" law](#).

2016 was the year of North Carolina's ill-fated ["bathroom bill."](#)

2017 was the year when [Mississippi's extreme law HB 1523](#) took effect—a fitting capstone to an [already challenging year for LGBT Americans](#).

If history repeats itself, 2018 will see another major state-level attack on [LGBT people](#). But after the [overreaching](#) and headline-generating legislation of the past three years, [a new report](#) from the Human Rights Campaign suggests that we can expect state-level anti-LGBT bills to get narrower in focus, while remaining just as pointed in their intent.

In particular, the HRC's [new State Equality Index](#) report warns of a "flurry" of anti-LGBT bills in 2018 that are more "sector-specific" than the "sweeping" bills of years past, focusing on areas like [adoption](#), education, and [wedding services](#). That narrowing of focus is a strategic move, according to HRC State Legislative Director Kate Oakley.

"After the Indiana RFRA in 2015 and HB 2 in North Carolina in 2016, it became harder for states to justify the tremendous amount of blowback that came with these sweeping anti-LGBTQ bills," Oakley told The Daily Beast, adding that those high-profile failures certainly "didn't stop states from trying."

As 2018 state legislative sessions officially get underway, it's becoming clear that some states are still trying—and that some of their efforts could fly under the national radar.

"Iowa, Tennessee, West Virginia, Georgia, and Oklahoma are states that are particularly likely to entertain anti-equality legislation," the HRC report notes.

Proposed anti-LGBT bills in these states ranges from the broadly cruel to the bizarrely specific—and, so far, these bills have primarily been highlighted by local advocacy groups and media outlets.

In Iowa, for example, the state-level LGBT rights organization One Iowa noted in a [petition](#)

that they expect to see “more efforts to weaken the Iowa Civil Rights Act” during the 2018 legislative session. As the Iowa Civil Rights Commission notes, that legislation has protected both sexual orientation and gender identity since July 2007 ([PDF](#)).

In Tennessee, [as the Tennessean reported](#), a Republican state representative recently introduced a bill that would force the state to defend and “hold harmless” any school district that hypothetically does not comply with any future state-level [restroom protections for transgender students](#). This more convoluted bill comes after several attempts at a straightforward “bathroom bill” in previous years.

In Georgia, as the [Georgia Voice reported](#), a “religious freedom” bill could become law this year and a provision could be added to an adoption bill that would allow adoption agencies to turn away same-sex couples based on their “mission.” (Recent reporting from the [Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#) describes a Republican-controlled state legislature that is split between those who want to maintain Georgia’s economic viability and those who want to pass a “religious freedom” bill anyway.)

It’s still too early to tell where the next anti-LGBT law will become law—as Oakley told The Daily Beast when asked which specific pieces of legislation HRC would be tracking this year, legislatures are now “only starting to convene for the 2018 session”—but some general trends can already be traced.

Although North Carolina attracted national attention for [restricting transgender people’s restroom use](#), another malicious but [lesser-known provision of HB 2](#)—a state-level ban on municipalities passing their own LGBT protections—could also become popular in 2018, the HRC report warns. Such laws would effectively undermine the tremendous but piecemeal LGBT progress that has been made on the local level in recent years.

Oakley also specifically cited successful state-level 2017 bills that allowed for anti-LGBT discrimination in child services. South Dakota’s law in this area, as the [New York Daily News noted](#), effectively allows child placement agencies to cite “sincerely-held religious belief” in denying services to LGBT people. Such legislation could be replicated elsewhere in the coming year.

And the HRC report further indicates that anti-LGBT groups will “continue to target” transgender people with bills that could focus on everything from restroom use to [public school athletics](#) to the legal processes for changing gender markers on state identification.

Oakley told The Daily Beast that “in comparison to just a few years ago, anti-transgender bills have been less likely to be taken seriously by their legislatures” but warned that it’s still “absolutely” possible we could see another “bathroom bill” in 2018.

Overall, 2018 will likely see anti-LGBT lawmakers chiseling away at the same discriminatory projects they’ve long been working on—just with finer tools.

“In order to try to achieve the same discriminatory purposes without being labeled an

extreme anti-LGBTQ politician, we're seeing legislation that is a bit more nuanced," Oakley said.

But there is still hope for [LGBT Americans](#) in the fact that, even against [the grim backdrop of 2017](#), most of last year's state-level anti-LGBT bills failed—including [a "bathroom bill" in Texas](#) that died during a special summertime legislative session.

"Though many challenges await the LGBTQ community in the upcoming year, and the onslaught of anti-equality legislation is not likely to let up, the statistical success of advocates in defeating the overwhelming majority of anti-LGBTQ bills in 2017 indicates that surge of harmful legislation is continuing to be beaten back," the report concludes.

Indeed, if history repeats itself, there will be more anti-LGBT legislation in 2018—but most of it will fail.

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