



Tennessee May Ban Teaching of Homosexuality in Elementary School

Last week, the Senate Education Committee of the State Senate of Tennessee passed a bill that forbids public school elementary and middle school teachers from “furnishing any materials on human sexuality other than heterosexuality.”

The bill and a companion measure introduced in the state House of Representatives (SB 49 and HB 229, respectively) seek to recognize the...

sensitivity of particular subjects that are best explained and discussed in the home. Human sexuality is a complex subject with societal, scientific, psychological, and historical implications; those implications are best understood by children with sufficient maturity to grasp their complexity.



Such a position on the issue of state-sponsored instruction in human sexuality to young children is supported by research. According to a poll conducted in 2004 by the Kaiser Family Foundation, Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, and National Public Radio, only eight percent of high school parents and four percent of middle school parents said schools should teach “that homosexuality is acceptable.”

It would seem contradictory to the notion of parental sovereignty to allow schoolteachers (whose salaries are paid by taxpayers) to undermine the messages being delivered to children at home by turning a blind eye to the teaching of lessons affirming a type of lifestyle that parents consider immoral.

Despite its reasonable and narrowly tailored aim, the bill has attracted reams of [negative press](#), including the application of the misleading nickname of the “Don’t Say Gay” bill.

The chief sponsor of the legislation, [Senator Stacey Campfield](#) (R-Knoxville) has been working on passing similar bills for the better part of a decade, including during his six years as a member of the state House.

Part of the opposition to the bill comes from the fact that the law of the Volunteer State already makes the teaching of any sex education lesson a misdemeanor unless it is demonstrated that such is consistent with the “family life curriculum” established by the state Board of Education.

In light of this existing regulation, during deliberations in the Senate Education Committee, Sen. Jim Tracy (R-Shelbyville) suggested changing the bill so as to mandate a study be conducted by the state Board of Education to discover whether the state’s public school teachers are violating the law by



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teaching about homosexuality.

In response, Senator Campfield insists that such activity is taking place, despite testimony from spokesmen for the Board of Education and the state Department of Education that they've received no reports of teachers lecturing on homosexuality.

Although the Tracy amendment was not included in the bill, an alteration proposed by Senator Brian Kelsey (R-Germantown) was written into the measure prior to the committee vote. The revision made by Kelsey requires that the Board of Education adopt the Campfield language as part of the "family life curriculum" following a study on the issue, the results of which are due by February 1.

The bill as amended was approved 6-3 along party lines (all "no" votes cast by Democrats) and sent to the Senate floor.



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