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Chemical Castration Sought for Child Abusers

By Alex Chachkevitch

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Two months after President Dmitry Medvedev called for the voluntary chemical castration of child molesters, a Just Russia deputy introduced a bill demanding mandatory chemical castration to the State Duma on Monday.

The government, however, has criticized the bill as too expensive. But the draft may be just an attempt to clear the way for the Kremlin, which is working on a similar bill, said children rights defender Boris Altshuler.

The bill's author, Anton Belyakov, said by telephone that most convicted child abusers resume the abuse after their release from prison, so medical treatment offers a safe alternative.

"The situation is just plain stupid," Belyakov said. "It's the same child molesters committing crimes over and over again. They sit out their time and then do it again."

The bill says people convicted of child molestation — which carries a sentence of eight to 20 years in prison — must start medical treatment to inhibit their sexual drive six months before their release.

They are to continue the treatment, which blocks the male sex hormone testosterone, every few months upon release, Belyakov said. He added that the process can be reversed anytime by simply stopping taking medication.

He said 97 percent of convicts return to child molestation after serving their prison time, but only 3 percent commit new crimes in countries where chemical castration is used. He did not say where he got his data from.

"Why are we trying to invent something ourselves when it's already being successfully done in other countries?" Belyakov said.

Countries that implement chemical castration include Britain, France and the United States, where nine states, among them Florida and California, employ the procedure as punishment for serious sex offenses.

The practice was developed in the 1940s, and its use was initially not limited to child molesters but included, among others, homosexuals. Among the more famous victims of such treatment was computer scientist Alan Turing, who agreed to chemical castration in 1952 to avoid being jailed for being gay. He committed suicide two years later.

The procedure has side effects, including breast enlargement and reduced bone density, which increases risk of cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis. This has prompted several human rights organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union, to oppose it as cruel and unconstitutional.

The government, which has spent two years reviewing Belyakov's bill, eventually denounced it for putting extra strain on the budget, RIA-Novosti reported. But the cost of initial treatment is only 1,000 rubles ($35) per person, and total state expenses for the program would amount to some 8 million rubles ($287,000) a year, the report said.

The issue was addressed by Medvedev in May, when he also called for chemical castration of child molesters, but only as a voluntary measure.

But Belyakov said mandatory castration was the only measure short of a life sentence guaranteed to stop molesters. "I'm glad that Medvedev has also started to take the issue of pedophilia seriously," he said. "But I disagree that it should be voluntary."

Belyakov, himself a pediatrician, said he has been "ridiculed" by government officials but still decided to introduce the bill to the Duma. "I cannot say how the parliament's majority will now react to the bill," he said. "But I'll hope for the best."

Altshuler, who heads an organization called Child's Right, said the Duma, controlled by the pro-Kremlin United Russia party, was likely to ignore Belyakov's draft in favor of Medvedev's yet unfiled one.

A Just Russia, widely seen as a Kremlin project to steal votes from the Communists, took

a pro-government stance when it was founded in 2006 but has fallen out of favor with the Kremlin in recent months, apparently because it began competing for votes with United Russia ahead of the Duma elections in December.

An issue unaddressed by both A Just Russia and the Kremlin so far is that very few molesters are getting caught. Belyakov, citing Interior Ministry statistics, said 100 to 1,000 people are jailed every year, a figure that he called low in comparison with the 17,000 child sex crimes that occur during the same period.

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