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Duma Passes Anti-Gay Law in First Reading

By The Moscow Times

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The State Duma on Friday gave its initial approval to a bill heavily criticized by international rights groups that bans so-called "homosexual propaganda" among minors.

The bill was supported by 338 deputies, with only one lawmaker opposing it, Sergei Kuzin of United Russia, and one abstaining, Dmitry Nosov of the Liberal Democratic Party.

The bill, which stipulates fines for promoting homosexuality among minors, was introduced in the Duma in March by Novosibirsk regional lawmakers. The date for its consideration in the Duma had been pushed back several times before being voted on in a first reading Friday.

Gudkov wrote on Twitter that the bill was being used to distract people from "more important" topics, such as a bill passed in a first reading this week giving regions the option not to hold gubernatorial elections.

Human rights organizations said the bill would aggravate divisions in society over the issue of gay rights.

At a protest against the bill held by gay rights defenders outside the Duma building on Friday, fights broke out with activists in favor of the initiative, resulting in 20 arrests by police. Activists brawled at a similar event earlier this week also held near the Duma.

St. Petersburg and several regions including Novosibirsk, Ryazan, Arkhangelsk and Kostroma have already passed similar laws.

"A similar bill in the Ryazan region was recognized as being discriminative by the UN Committee on Human Rights in October," said Yulia Gorbunova of Human Rights Watch. "We are concerned that instead of adjusting Russian legislation to international norms, our government wants to make the law work on the federal level."

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