

California Lawmakers Urge Pension Funds to Halt Russia Investments

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Top Democrats in the California Senate asked the state's multibillion-dollar public employee pension funds to refrain from making future investments in Russia, adding their voices to protests against restrictions on gay rights there.

A resolution proposed on Monday by Senator Mark Leno, President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg and others urges the California Public Employee Retirement System, or CalPERS, and the California State Teachers Retirement System, to halt investments in Russia until the issue is resolved.

CalPERS, the largest employee pension system in the nation, has \$266 billion invested around the globe, of which \$1.4 billion is invested in Russia.

The nonbinding resolution, which must be passed by the full Senate, protests a ban on same-sex couples from adopting Russian children, and a law prohibiting gay "propaganda."

The measures are part of the conservative course taken by President Vladimir Putin on social issues since his return to the Kremlin in May 2012.

Critics say the propaganda law effectively disallows all gay rights rallies and could be used to prosecute anyone voicing support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals.

"The resolution condemns Russia's official attack on the LGBT community," Leno said in an interview. "It also calls upon the president and Congress and the State Department to encourage the decriminalization of homosexuality in all countries."

The resolution additionally asks the International Olympic Committee to demand a written promise that gay athletes will not be affected by the propaganda law when the games are held in the Russian city of Sochi next year.

CalPERS said in a statement Monday that it always strives for responsible investing.

"CalPERS is a strong defender of human and civil rights across the globe," the statement said. "CalPERS will continue its prudent review of all investments and will consider current developments as it abides by all applicable laws."

Anger at the Russian laws has been building for months among gay rights activists and others in the U.S.

Last month activists and Seattle-based sex advice columnist Dan Savage called for a boycott of Russian vodka in response to anti-gay violence and the restrictive laws.

Soon after, gay rights activists in New York City dumped vodka onto the street to protest the Russian laws, and a growing number of gay bar owners across the U.S. vowed to stop pouring Russian vodka.

The call to "dump Russian vodka" came after Russian investigators said in May that a 23-year-old man had been tortured and killed after revealing to a friend that he was gay.

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