

Gays' Kids Could Be Taken by State Under Proposed Bill

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A newly submitted bill that threatens gays' parental rights caused another wave of backlash from LGBT society.

A United Russia lawmaker on Thursday submitted a bill that would make "nontraditional sexual orientation" a legal basis for depriving someone of his parental rights, the latest measure that would curb the liberties of LGBT people in Russia.

The bill, submitted by State Duma Deputy Alexei Zhuravlyov, would add a paragraph to Article 69 of the Family Code making sexual orientation a factor in cases when the government is deciding whether to take a child into state custody, Interfax reported.

Zhuravlyov said in an explanatory note to the bill that, according to experts, 5 to 7 percent of Russians have a "nontraditional" sexual orientation and a third of them currently have children.

The proposed legislation comes just a few months after the State Duma's approval of a law banning same-sex couples from adopting Russian children. Lawmakers said at the time that the legislation would help Russia develop its own system of adoptions.

Zhuravlyov did not provide a rationale for the new initiative, but it follows the passage earlier this year of the controversial "gay propaganda" law that ostensibly aims to protect minors from exposure to information about "nontraditional" sexual orientations. Officials have said minors' psyches are not yet fully formed and thus could be damaged by such information.

Mikhail Fedotov, head of the Kremlin's human rights council, responded to the new bill with indignation.

"Will we deprive left-handed people of their driver's licenses now too? They're left-handed, you know, and all our vehicles have the steering wheel on the left side, so it's harder for a left-handed person to drive," Fedotov said, the BBC's Russian service reported.

Many LGBT activists have expressed concerns in the past about the possibility of such a law after United Russia Deputy Yelena Mizulina said such legislation was in the pipeline. Lesbian journalist Masha Gessen, who has multiple children, issued perhaps the most stark warning by emigrating to the U.S. to avoid the potential fallout of such a bill.

But according to Nikolai Alexeyev, a prominent gay rights activist, Zhuravlyov's bill is unlikely to be signed into law.

"I think it's absolute nonsense. I can't imagine how this initiative would be accepted in the Duma. I think it's just the latest populist move to attract attention to a certain individual," Alexeyev told Interfax on Thursday, adding that the "deputies are competing to see who can come up with the most absurd initiative."

"I don't believe that things like this can end up in law and be signed by the president. The president says the rights of homosexuals are not infringed upon, but initiatives like this will create excessive tension between Russia and the West. It's a provocation against the Russian government," Alexeyev said.

If Zhuravlyov's bill is passed by the State Duma, it would then have to be approved by the Federation Council before being signed into law by President Vladimir Putin.

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