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Bill Targeting Gay Parents Is 'Unenforceable,' Deputy Says

By Ezekiel Pfeifer

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One of the main backers of an anti-gay law that has drawn harsh criticism from rights groups and Western governments poured cold water Thursday on a newly proposed bill targeting LGBT parents, saying it was unlikely to be passed and was "unenforceable."

United Russia State Duma Deputy Yelena Mizulina, who has become the lawmaker most identified with the "gay propaganda" law passed this summer, also said the new bill would "really agitate public opinion," likely fueling Western critiques of Russia's treatment of gays.

"We would essentially be conducting a kind of a filtering of the entire adult population, and that's not realistic," Mizulina told Interfax after leading preliminary discussion of the bill in the Duma's Family, Women and Children Committee that she chairs.

The draft bill, recently submitted by United Russia lawmaker Alexei Zhuravlyov, would authorize the government to deprive people of their parental rights for engaging

in "nontraditional sexual relations."

Ahead of discussion of the bill Thursday, advocacy group Human Rights First issued a statement calling on the Duma to reject it.

"The newly proposed amendments to the family code perpetuate the discrimination and stigmatization of gay Russians and are an attack on families in general, because they empower the government to strip individuals of parental rights for ambiguously defined noncriminal behavior," the New York-based NGO's Innokenty Grekov said in the statement released Wednesday.

Grekov noted that the legislation failed to define "nontraditional sexual relations" and did not specify how the nature of those relations might be established in a court of law, making the proposed amendments particularly open to abuse.

In a report released last month, Human Rights First linked the curtailing of LGBT rights in Russia to a sweeping crackdown on dissent and on civil society in general, noting that the Kremlin had been firmly opposed to proposals similar to the adopted legislation in the mid-2000s.

"Back then, the ambiguous language of the 'propaganda' bills was condemned by the Prime Minister's Office as contradictory to Russia's Constitution and criminal code and the European Convention on Human Rights," the group said.

At the conclusion of its meeting Thursday, Mizulina's committee recommended that the bill be put on a draft list of legislation to be worked on during the Duma's spring session, which begins in February.

Outside the Duma building on Thursday, a group of five gay-rights activists protested the newly proposed bill, standing in medical scrubs with a sign that read "Psychological Assistance for State Duma Deputies."

"The ideas of certain people in the State Duma that are embodied in laws are not only devoid of logic and reason but also call into question the [mental] competence of certain deputies," protest organizer Alexei Davydov told news portal Gayrussia.eu.

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