

AT&T Criticizes Anti-Gay Legislation

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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SOCHI — Complaints about a Russian law criticized as a stifling of gay rights rose anew Wednesday, just days before the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Sochi, as a U.S. Olympic sponsor and UN panel condemned the law and protests were planned for around the world.

Some athletes, barred by IOC rules from political debate while competing, hinted at the law as they began training for events that start Thursday. American figure skater Ashley Wagner joked that Sochi's color scheme — omnipresent inside the Olympic Park — reminded her of the rainbow flag used to symbolize gay pride.

"It does not really matter where I am. It is still my opinion," Wagner said. "I just believe in equality for all."

The law signed by President Vladimir Putin in July bans pro-gay "propaganda" that could be accessible to minors. Critics say it is so restrictive that it forbids almost any public expression of support for gay rights.

Detractors have pressed the International Olympic Committee and its corporate sponsors to denounce the law and call for its repeal, launching a campaign on several fronts in July that included a boycott of Russian vodka.

All Out, a New York-based advocacy group, planned demonstrations Wednesday in 19 cities worldwide, including St. Petersburg, Jerusalem and Rio de Janeiro, the site of the 2016 Summer Games, to urge Olympics sponsors to speak out against the law.

Also Wednesday, a UN committee on children's rights urged Russia to repeal the law, saying it encourages discrimination and violence. A day earlier, AT&T called the law harmful to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and harmful to a diverse society.

"We support LGBT equality globally and we condemn violence, discrimination and harassment targeted against LGBT individuals everywhere," AT&T said in the post on its website.

AT&T said its statement was a reply to a request from the Human Rights Campaign, an advocacy group that supports the civil rights of LGBT people and has urged the International Olympic Committee's official sponsors to stand up for LGBT equality.

AT&T is not an IOC sponsor, but is an official sponsor of the U.S. Olympic Committee and says it supports the campaign's principles. The telecommunications giant is the first major U.S. corporation to publicly condemn Russia's law, the Washington-based group said.

"Other sponsors that have failed to lead should take corrective action immediately," the campaign said in a post on its website. "A company that claims to support LGBT equality should do so wherever it operates, not just in the U.S."

The issue has presented a challenge for athletes who may have personal views on the issue but are barred by IOC rules from making political remarks or demonstrations during the games.

U.S. gold-medalist snowboarder Hannah Teter backtracked Wednesday from an October interview saying she would support a Sochi boycott and perhaps speak out on the issue at the Games.

"I said that a long time ago and definitely took it back," Teter said of comments she made to Time magazine. "I decided I want to represent the U.S. and show what snowboarding's all about."

When asked to denounce the law, the IOC and its top sponsors — who pay millions for the rights to use the Olympic rings and other symbols in television commercials and other marketing — have expressed opposition to discrimination in general and pledged to ensure that people gathering for the Olympics would not be affected.

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