

Russian Official Calls for Probe Into LGBT Scandal That Ended FLEX Program

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Russian Deputy Prime Minister Olga Golodets called on Wednesday for a thorough investigation into the case of a Russian teenager for whom an American same-sex couple allegedly filed for custody while he was taking part in a student exchange program in the United States.

"We are faced with an absolutely unexpected situation as the country [the U.S.] is practically preventing the child's departure," Golodets said in comments carried by RIA Novosti on Wednesday.

Golodets added that complaints from students' parents is what prompted Russia's announcement last week that it would suspend its participation in the FLEX ("Future Leaders Exchange") program, established in the aftermath of the Cold War to give high school students from 12 former Soviet republics the opportunity to study in the U.S. for a year.

Russia's children's rights ombudsman Pavel Astakhov told reporters last week that the U.S. had violated one of the program's terms: that students would be required to return to Russia

at the end of the academic year.

In an interview with Rossiiskaya Gazeta, Astakhov said that a Russian teenage boy had been supposed to return to the country in May, but had failed to come home. Astakhov also alleged that a same-sex couple was hosting the child and had filed to take custody of him, oblivious to the fact that the child's mother lived in Russia.

Although some FLEX students are in fact placed with same-sex host parents, the child in question had been placed in a "traditional" family environment, according to David Patton, executive vice president of American Councils, which runs the FLEX program.

Since 1992, more than 8,000 Russian teenagers have studied in the U.S. as part of the program.

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