

New Trans Student Laws in Virginia

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Legal Watch

The administration of Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R) has severely curtailed the rights of transgender pupils, causing chaos in the classrooms and attracting harsh criticism from some educators and Democratic legislators, while receiving praise from Republicans and proponents of parental rights. All 133 of the state's school districts must approve a copy of the new "model policies" this month, which mandate that transgender children use school facilities and programs that correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth. Due to the regulations, students find it difficult to change their names and gender at school.

But, Virginia's students won't be so easily oppressed. On Tuesday September 27th, thousands of students in Virginia joined in walkouts at more than 90 different schools to protest the planned rules. The Pride Liberation Project, a statewide LGBTQ student advocacy organization, planned the walkouts, which took place throughout the day, with the final universities completing their demonstrations right before classes ended for the day. "These revised guidelines will only hurt students in a time when students are facing unparalleled mental health challenges, and are a cruel attempt to politicize the existence of LGBTQIA+ students for political gain," the group stated.

The draft policy released Sept. 16 by the state education department would require transgender students to use school facilities and programs matching their "biological sex." Families would need to submit legal papers to change a student's name and gender on official school records, and parents would need to give permission for teachers and other employees to refer to pupils at school by a different name or pronoun.

Students like Catherine Knecht said Youngkin is using "this cover of parental rights to push a political agenda" through schools. The main purpose of schools is to educate and keep students safe, she said, and "politics do not have to be a part of that."

Youngkin said he expects schools to follow the law when it comes to the new guidance. "It's the law and so I don't really have a lot of patience for folks that see a law and don't comply with it," said Youngkin on Sept. 20. "Protecting parents' fundamental rights to make decisions for their children is in the Virginia code, and I fully expect that each one of the school divisions should comply," he said.

Maybe what Youngkin should have expected is that the majority of today's students are brave enough to unlearn all the hatred and fear towards those, including themselves, who are different.