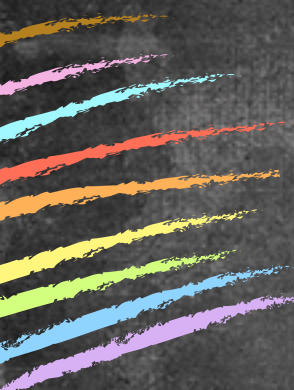




FLORIDA'S AFRAID To SAY GAY



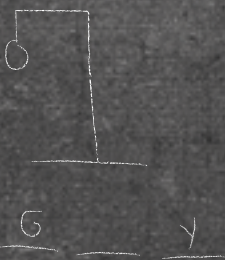
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Social-Politics writer and Florida native Alejandro Rosales deconstructs what exactly Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill implicates, and why it's so wrong.

The "Don't Say Gay" bill — how much more homophobic could a person be than insinuating the word gay can't even be mentioned? Those words echo the infamous "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" United States military policy that was in place until 2011, where military members were discouraged from mentioning that they were LGBTQIA+. That was 2011, this is 2022 — and we are faced with the same, if not more blatant and appalling, forms of homophobia at the cruel hands of the Florida government.

The aforementioned "Don't Say Gay" bill swiftly moved through the Florida legislature and was signed into law by Florida governor Ron DeSantis on March 28. The governor criticized children's ability to speak on gender identity or choosing their own identity in schools and has labeled such conversations as "entirely inappropriate." The legislation, a part of a larger "Parents Rights in Education" House Bill, would discourage any lesson plans or classroom discussions pertaining to "sexual orientation or gender identity in primary grade levels or in a manner that is not age-appropriate." What is considered "age-appropriate" is a vague term that would be up for Florida's Department of Education to establish.



Besides the blatant homophobic practices of barring the discussion or inclusion of LGBTQIA+ subject matter in Florida public schools, it should also be noted that parents, under the bill's provisions, may sue the school if they garner suspicion that there is classroom dialogue about LGBTQIA+ topics. The legislation threatens to harm the safety and growth of LGBTQIA+ individuals who, especially in Florida, are highly deprived of any such sexual or gender orientation teaching material or discussion.

Of particular note is a quote by bill sponsor Joe Harding, who stated that the statute was meant to avoid

"a six-year-old [from having] one identity in school and one at home because the school encourages that kind of behavior."

Not only is this comment rooted in homophobia, disrespecting the identity of a child, but it is also rooted in insufficient grounds. Instead of criticizing a child for having "different identities" at school versus at home, why not consider why they need to have such different identities, why they feel compelled to put on a façade at

home versus in an outdoor environment where they perceive more safety and freedom of expression. **Why must the bill concern itself with not teaching children about different sexual and gender identities and instead focus on the astronomically high rates of LGBTQIA+ suicide and abuse they face from their families for being “different?”**

Sentiments defending the bill only raise more hatred and questions about politicians’ real priorities. The simple fact of the matter is policy makers do not care about parents’ rights in education, the basis of the whole of the bill. They care about kicking the LGBTQIA+ community to the curb and further stigmatizing a group that already faces constant hatred, bigotry, and threats in a notoriously conservative and homophobic state. **The bill can be described as nothing short of a homophobic attack on the youth of Florida and education as a whole.** The legislation, and any subsequent bills it may inspire in other states, will only further divide the population and ostracize the LGBTQIA+, continuing to reinforce heteronormativity and leaving members of the LGBTQIA+ feeling lost, vulnerable, and unrepresented.

The bill has also faced public opposition

and criticism, with multiple rallies and counter-protests occurring around Florida, including ones organized by Safe Schools South Florida, a Floridian LGBTQIA+ advocacy organization. The bill was later signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis, but not before The White House made the rare move to comment on the situation, with President Joe Biden condemning the state bill, tweeting that **LGBTQIA+ individuals are “loved and accepted just as [they] are”, especially including those “impacted by this hateful bill.”** The statement comes amidst deep discontent between the White House and Florida’s DeSantis over a multitude of different social and political topics, using the lives and safety of LGBTQIA+ individuals as political warfare between the two branches. It is not just Florida dealing with homophobic laws and discrimination — bills across the country are being proposed and signed, targeting marginalized community members. Anti-transgender sports laws have been a hotbed issue throughout multiple states, with lawmakers in Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, South Dakota, Tennessee, and West Virginia having laws prohibiting transgender athletes from competing with their peers in the K-12 level. Preexisting anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation still exists

in states as well, such as the heinous gay panic defense, a legal strategy used legally in multiple states to defend acts of violence against the LGBTQIA+ due to homosexuality alone. **Homophobia still thrives in the legal system, and the “Don’t Say Gay” bill is only the next chapter of this sickening trend.**

Speaking from a place of connection growing up in Florida, there is already no LGBTQIA+ representation in education. Sexual education courses, if available, only focus on heterosexual relationships. Elementary schools only teach about heteronormative relationships and living situations while omitting the existence of LGBTQIA+ individuals and their family structures. Children of the state already have to seek oftentimes dangerous online resources simply to get a grasp of who they are and to know they are not alone, buried deep in a closet created and fostered by an unrepresentative educational system. The “Don’t Say Gay” bill does nothing to support parents’ rights to education and does everything to burn down the LGBTQIA+ community and youth that only wish to be accepted and recognized.

