

House narrowly passes bill allowing all-gender bathrooms

Sponsor reported spread of misinformation, threats of violence

By PETER HANCOCK
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SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois House narrowly passed a bill Thursday that would allow businesses, universities and other building owners to designate multi-occupancy all-gender bathrooms if they choose to do so.

The bill passed on a vote of 60-40, the bare minimum number of “yes” votes needed for passage in the 118-member House, after the presiding officer held the roll open for several seconds waiting for the 60th vote to be recorded.

State Rep. Katie Stuart, D-Edwardsville, who sponsored the bill, said the language of House Bill 1286 is identical to an earlier bill that passed 63-43 in the House in 2021 but was never taken up in the Senate.

Illinois law already allows for single-occupancy bathrooms to be designated for all genders, but Stuart’s bill would allow an all-gender designation for bathrooms that

accommodate two or more people.

The bill sets out standards that all-gender bathrooms would have to meet, such as “inclusive signage” that does not indicate any specific gender; stall dividers with functioning locks controlled by the user; and partitions for each urinal, if urinals are present.

In addition, if such bathrooms are part of a newly constructed building or a building undergoing major renovation, they would have to comply with requirements of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and the Illinois Accessibility Code. Each toilet stall would have to include a small trash receptacle, and it would have to have at least one vending machine for menstruation supplies and one baby diaper changing station.

The bill also provides that any multi-occupancy restroom could be converted to an all-gender restroom. But if another single-gender multi-occupancy restroom is located adjacent to or near the all-gender restroom, both would have

to be designated as all-gender facilities.

The bill passed out of the House Human Services Committee on Feb. 22 on a 6-3 vote after only brief discussion. But just a few days later, Stuart said she was forced to cancel a planned constituent coffee event in Collinsville, “due to violent threats and malicious information being spread by special interest groups about bathroom privacy and safety legislation.”

“Yeah, there was some, I think, deliberately incendiary information being touted, real falsities about what was in the bill that was leading to, you know, frankly, threats and things that I didn’t want to expose my staff and the public to,” Stuart said during an interview Thursday. “So we chose to cancel a public event.”

She said when the 2021 bill passed, there was more debate about it on the floor of the House than there was Thursday, but she did not receive the kinds of personal attacks and threats over it that she received this year.

“I think it’s just the general mood,” she said. “Unfortunately, we’ve gotten to kind of a real ugly place in our politics where people stoke division and fear and hate for political gain. And they’re not ashamed to lie in the process.”

She stressed that the bill does not mandate that any bathroom be designated for all genders, but only allows building owners to do so if they choose.

The bill was just one of hundreds of bills the House has voted on this week as it nears a Friday deadline for most bills to pass out of the House and be sent to the Senate. The Senate has a similar deadline to send its bills to the House by next Friday, March 30.

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House passes bill prohibiting book bans

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SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois House passed a bill Wednesday that would prohibit libraries from banning books or other material because of partisan or doctrinal pressure, prompting strong opposition from Republicans who called it an assault on local control.

House Bill 2789 is an initiative of Democratic Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias, whose office oversees the Illinois State Library and administers several grant programs for public and school libraries as well as adult literacy programs throughout the state.

The bill would require that as a condition of qualifying for those grants in the future, libraries or library systems would have to adopt a written policy prohibiting the practice of banning books. Alternatively, they could adopt the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights, which includes a statement that “(m)aterials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.”

The bill came in response to a wave of high-profile controversies throughout the country, including at least one in Illinois. School districts and public libraries have come under pressure to remove certain material from their collections, often material dealing with issues involving race, sexuality and gender identity.

“Banning books is the sort of behavior that was once, for good reason, associated with the

worst, most repressive and repugnant authoritarian regimes of the mid-20th century and before,” the bill’s lead sponsor Rep. Anne Stava-Murray, D-Naperville, said during debate on the House floor. “The fact that this is even up for discussion in America in the 21st century is disgusting. And yet, just last year in my district, that discussion was spurred on by a few radical parents and the Proud Boys hate group over a book called ‘Gender Queer.’”

That book is a memoir by Maia Kobabe about a nonbinary person grappling with issues of gender identity and sexuality as a teenager and young adult. According to the New York Times, it has been pulled from library shelves in dozens of school districts around the country.

One of the school districts that came under pressure to remove the book was Community High School District 99, in Downers Grove, in Stava-Murray’s district. According to a June 2022 Chicago Sun-Times story, the pressure was generated by a group of conservative parents and members of the Proud Boys, but students in the district pushed back and the board eventually voted unanimously to keep the book on the shelves.

“Students led a community-supported effort in my district to keep the book in the library,” Stava-Murray said. “But kids shouldn’t have to be the heroes... Nobody is forcing you or your children to check out or purchase or read these books. If they are not consistent with your personal beliefs, don’t read

them.”

PEN American, in a report on book bans around the country, identified five enforced bans in the state between July 2021 and June 2022, including 3 bans of Gender Queer.

Some Republicans, however, argued that public libraries are governed by locally elected boards, and that those boards should have the authority to decide how best to serve their communities.

“I find this a complete assault on local control,” said Rep. Martin McLaughlin, R-Barrington Hills. “... These people volunteer as nonpartisan elected local officials, and for the state to tell a local library board, ‘listen to the professionals; follow the professionals’ – I don’t understand why we have local elections anymore if a bill like this passes.”

Rep. C.D. Davidsmeyer, R-Jacksonville, said that he used to serve on his local library board and when his own children visit the library, they are accompanied by a parent. But he said that is not necessarily the case when they are at school using the school library.

“I am not for banning books at all,” he said. “I am for age-appropriate materials. And so, if a parent wants their kid to have those age-appropriate materials, they can certainly get them for them. I don’t think that a librarian is the end-all, be-all decision maker in the state of Illinois on what books should be given to a child.”

Stava-Murray, however, rejected those arguments, saying the bill would only add another condition onto the rules to qual-

ify for grants administered by the secretary of state. Last year, the office awarded more than 1,600 grants totaling more than \$62 million, including a \$4,300 grant to Downers Grove Community High School District 99.

“In terms of the argument about local control, I find that disgusting. Local Control has long been a dog whistle for allowing statewide or nationwide racist or bigoted policies to persist,” she said, eliciting loud boos from the Republican side of the aisle. “Today, I just strongly urge my colleagues to do the right thing and make sure that access to books is not infringed upon in our state.”

The bill passed the House 69-39 with all of the no votes coming from Republicans. Three Democrats and one Republican were recorded as present but not voting. The bill next goes to the Senate for consideration.

“Public and school libraries are facing unprecedented censorship of books and resources, not just in Illinois but throughout the nation,” Giannoulias said in a statement after the vote. “This important first-in-the-nation legislation combats book banning and upholds freedom of speech, which America has always stood for. I applaud the Illinois House of Representatives for passing this important measure and encourage the State Senate to do the same.”

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APRIL 4, 2023 CONSOLIDATED ELECTION

GRACE PERIOD REGISTRATION & VOTING

If you are not registered to vote by the voter registration deadline of March 7, 2023 but you are a qualified resident of Douglas County, you may register to vote in person in the County Clerk’s Office located on the 2nd floor of the Courthouse, Tuscola, Illinois and once registered must vote in person at that same time in the County Clerk’s office.

FIRST DAY: MARCH 8, 2023
LAST DAY: APRIL 4, 2023

EARLY VOTING

This allows a voter to make application for a ballot and vote without having to be absent from the County on Election Day.

Registered voters may vote early in the County Clerk’s Office from 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., Monday through Friday.

EARLY VOTING BEGINS: FEBRUARY 23, 2023

VOTE BY MAIL

Registered voters may vote by Mail. Voters may request a ballot be mailed by contacting the County Clerk’s office at 217-253-2442 or elections@douglascountyil.gov for additional information in mailing a ballot.

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HOROSCOPES

ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20
Requests from friends, associates and family this week can have your nerves on end, Aries. You may have to escape the crowds to recharge. Plan a getaway in the next few days.

TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21
You are awesome at staying on track when you need to be, Taurus. That is what makes you a potentially ideal fitness guide. Try to inspire others to be regimented as well.

GEMINI – May 22/Jun 21
There is nothing wrong with putting rose-colored glasses on from time to time and looking at the world in a more positive way. A more positive outlook can be helpful, Gemini.

CANCER – Jun 22/Jul 22
Cancer, be sure that your generous nature does not come at the expense of your own well-being. You tend to put other people’s needs before your own quite

often.

LEO – Jul 23/Aug 23
Leo, for some reason you are having problems finding balance in your life right now. You may have to experiment a little bit to see if new strategies might work.

VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22
Let others in on some of your secrets, Virgo. You can’t hold everything in all of the time, and you have been shouldering a lot of responsibility for some time.

LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23
Libra, the personalized touches you put on any project will showcase your personality and passion. Think about embracing a crafty task to really showcase your talents.

SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22
Scorpio, friends are lining up to be quite helpful of late. When you figure out how much you’re getting done with the assistance of others, you may be more welcoming of it in the future.

SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21
Overcome resistance to listening to another person’s side of the story, Sagittarius. Embrace this person’s desire take the lead on something at work or in your home life.

CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20
A changing environment has you figuring out how to adapt your schedule and your skills, Capricorn. With a support team in your corner, you can achieve quite a bit.

AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18
Spending is a tad out of control this week, Aquarius. Money is flying out of your wallet at a rapid rate. You may need to be a bit more choosy with your spending moving forward.

PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20
Wait a few more days before making major decisions as your emotions are high right now, Pisces. You want a level head to prevail.