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# Florida panel backs ban on gender-affirming care for minors at contentious meeting



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After five hours discussing proposed restrictions on gender-affirming care, members of a key state medical committee cut short a contentious public meeting in Orlando — exiting as many in the crowd chanted, “Their blood is on your hands!”

A joint rules panel of the Florida Board of Medicine and the Florida Board of Osteopathic Medicine met Friday at the Hyatt Regency Orlando International Airport for a workshop on potential guidelines limiting gender-affirming care in Florida.

Although the panel did not finalize its proposed rules, members signaled support for prohibiting puberty blockers, cross-hormonal treatment and gender-affirming surgery as methods to treat gender dysphoria in patients under the age of 18.

Because they could not agree on whether to exclude from the ban gender-affirming treatments that are part of clinical trials and research, members recommended further discussion. The proposed rule will be reviewed again in the coming weeks when the panel will also decide when the measure will take effect.

The meeting ended an hour short of the time allotted, which led to a contentious exchange among board members, supporters, and critics of the recommendation.

“We were shut down,” said Abigael Hart, a transgender woman from Tampa. “They got one part ... that got to say what they were going to say and the residents of the state were erased.”



Kat Duesterhaus of the Florida National Organization for Women, talks to the media during a rally in support of gender-affirming care following a committee meeting of members of the Florida Boards of Medicine and Osteopathic Medicine on Friday, October 28, 2022.

The panel stopped hearing testimonies despite several people demanding to be heard, as a majority of the testimonies brought forward prior to the meeting's abrupt end were in support of the prohibition of gender-affirming care.

Friday's meeting came at the request of Florida Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo. Earlier this year, the Florida Health Department issued a [guideline](#) for gender-affirming care in the state, advising against puberty blockers, hormone treatments and surgeries for minors. The guideline went against the [recommendations](#) of the U.S. Department of Health of Human Services.

Among the practitioners opposing the proposal was Kristin Dayton, a certified pediatrician and pediatric endocrinologist.

Dayton said the decision to prescribe puberty blockers is only applied after multiple assessments and that transgender adults who get access to treatment during adolescence face fewer mental health problems.


"There is no one size fits all model," Dayton said, noting that gender-affirming care is endorsed by multiple medical associations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Physicians and the American Medical Association.

She called for the board to leave treatment decisions in the hands of physicians and patients, as treatments are highly individualized.

In response to Dayton's argument, the board highlighted the need for a multidisciplinary approach with a collaborative effort from pediatricians, endocrinologists and psychology experts.

Michael Laidlaw, a physician specializing in Endocrinology, Diabetes, and Metabolism, advocated for the prohibition of these treatments.

"The gender-affirming therapy treatment proposed by WPATH, and in place with WPATH, gives very powerful hormones and surgeries on what basis?" Laidlaw said, using an acronym for the World Professional Association for Transgender Health.

 Police presence following the meeting by members of the Florida Board of Medicine and Board of Osteopathic Medicine to discuss the efficacy of transgender care at the Hyatt Regency Orlando International Airport, on Friday, October 28, 2022.

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He presented compared the need to verify a patient's diabetes before prescribing insulin to what he called the need to investigate the factors causing gender dysphoria before providing gender-affirming care.

"Where can we find the evidence to be certain that these children will not desist by adulthood?" he asked, referring to [the disputed concept](#) that many transgender teens age out of their gender identity, rather than continue treatments into adulthood.

After the committee listened to the arguments of other medical specialists, they opened the floor for public comment, which was dominated by people who identified as formerly transgender and parents of transgender youth.

Bob and Mary Flynn spoke on their experience as parents of a 12-year-old transgender child who disclosed her identity to them at age 4.

"For the past 8 years, we've been on this beautiful journey, helping our child, who had suicidal ideations at age 5 and now is a healthy, happy 12-year-old, thriving in Florida," Mary Flynn said. "But we are scared that we're going to have to move because she has started gender-affirming care at age 12."

Mary Flynn said her daughter uses a puberty blocker and urged the board to consider the potentially life-or-death consequences of denying treatment to transgender youth.

"What you're talking about is waiting until age 18, well they won't be here, [they] could commit suicide," she said.

January Littlejohn, a licensed mental health professional, spoke on her daughter's experience with gender identity and how they addressed it.

She said in 2020, her daughter expressed discomfort with her sex and gender, which Littlejohn said her daughter had never expressed before a few of her classmates came out as transgender.

Littlejohn said that setting boundaries for her daughter such as allowing her to change her hair and clothing, but denying any physical procedures, helped with the child's mental health and urge to change her appearance.

"We also gave her one-on-one time, in-person activities away from trans influencers, limited her internet use, and declined to affirm her newly chosen names or pronouns," Littlejohn said.

Littlejohn said she was concerned to see suicide being raised as a consequence if a child does not get treatment rather than a risk factor among transgender youth.

A [2019 study](#) from UCLA's Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation & Gender found suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts are more prevalent among transgender youth. The report also found that those who experienced family rejection were more likely to report attempting suicide.

The Florida Coalition for Transgender Liberation organized a demonstration after the meeting to protest the board's posture. The group was also joined by the Florida National Organization for Women, Florida People's Advocacy Center and Women's March Florida.

The board finalized the meeting and left the room as Orlando Democratic state Reps. Anna Eskamani and Carlos Guillermo Smith arrived to speak.

"We are incredibly upset and frustrated by the board of medicine pursuing a political agenda to attack LGBTQ+ people and kids," Eskamani said. "This is an institution that's supposed to do no harm and yet they've been tasked by Gov. DeSantis to essentially erase transgender kids."

Eskamani criticized the panel for allowing those in support of the gender-affirming care ban to speak but leaving the testimony of those opposed to it incomplete.

"It's another weaponization of a state agency with real-life consequences because we're impacting kids' lives," Eskamani said.

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