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## 2023-02-08 Time Out Session: Miguel Rosario Sets Records in Collegiate Debut

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# Utah Bans Gender-Affirming Care for Transgender Youth

Hisham Bensaadat, Staff Reporter

On Jan. 28, 2023, Utah governor Spencer Cox signed a bill that will ban transgender youth from obtaining gender-affirming health care. This measure is one incident within a growing national trend of Republican lawmakers restricting gender-affirming and reproductive healthcare.

Cox, despite not having taken a public position about the issue, signed off on the bill a day after state lawmakers provided him with it. The bill officially prohibits gender-affirming surgery and hormone treatment for minors in the state, though those who have already been diagnosed with gender dysphoria may continue receiving treatment. Utah's largely Republican legislative branch considered a preliminary draft of the bill only a few days after opening their yearly session.

Cox cited the need to pause "permanent and life-altering treatments for new patients until more and better research can help determine the life-long consequences" as the reasoning behind his decision.

Before the bill passed, Utah's American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) urged Cox to veto the bill. The organization's letter expressed concerns that the policy would have "damaging and catastrophic effects" upon the lives of transgender youth.

Em Wheeler, a second-year photography and environmental studies major and the president of Seattle University's Triangle Club, believes the bill being passed sets the country back on supporting marginalized communities. He noted that even prior to bills like the one in Utah, the transgender community struggles to find support and affirming resources.

"I will never understand why comfort in your body should ever be illegal. I think even with all the progress made to educate the public on trans lives, it's very difficult for cis-gendered individuals to fully understand the extent of which trans individuals struggle when living in an unsupportive community or restricted from resources," Wheeler wrote to



## The Spectator.

The bill's sponsor, Senator Mike Kennedy, a Republican family doctor, said the oversight is critical for a healthcare policy related to gender and youth.

With the bill being passed, transgender youth are hindered from seeking the gender-affirming care they need. Sarah Torset, a third-year physics major and co-president of the Triangle Club, details how one can help to support those unable to receive gender-affirming care through empathy and community.

“Showing unconditional love and empathy for victims dealing with this situation is the most important step. Developing and maintaining a community that gives transgender youth the space to freely exist without judgment is critical in lowering mental health and suicide rates and that is even more essential now that many will not have access to the medical care they want or need. Educating non-transgender youth on the LGBTQ+ community and ways to care for that community are also vital in providing all students with spaces (like schools) that give them the ability to explore and understand their identity,” Torset wrote to The Spectator.

Marisa Mcpeck-Stringham, a mental health therapist in Layton, Utah, said many of her clients experienced suicidal ideation caused by the inability to seek gender-affirming care since the state has moved forward with the bill.

Although the ban does not affect anyone who was previously diagnosed with gender dysphoria, it blocks access to hormone therapy and puberty blockers for future trans youth. Organizations like the ACLU and the National Center for Lesbian Rights are planning a lawsuit as lawmakers have ordered a “systemic medical evidence review” for the care of trans minors.

Theresa Earenfight, the program director of women, gender and sexuality studies at Seattle U, details how citizens nationwide could work together to provide a better future for the LGBTQ+ youth, as gender identity and bodily integrity are not under the purview of states' rights.

“We cannot relax until Congress or the President acts to ensure our fundamental constitutional rights to life, liberty and happiness. We need to stay vigilant and work together to create that ‘more perfect union,’ one that respects each and every one of us.” Earenfight wrote to The Spectator.

Utah's move in banning gender-affirming care for transgender youth deeply concerns those working toward a society in which the queer community can live freely and safely. As fewer and fewer resources become available, the trans community and allies are coming together to support those affected by this bill, fighting for a future where the LGBTQ+ community can safely and freely express themselves without being impeded by discriminatory laws.