

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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NEW ORLEANS, LA – United Teachers of New Orleans, Local 527, AFT, AFL-CIO is alarmed and saddened that two bills in the current Louisiana legislative session, HB 81 and HB 466, have passed out of the House Education Committee and are scheduled for floor debate this week. These bills are an attack on critical freedoms of all students and educators, but they specifically target those in the LGBTQIA+ community. Not only would this legislation alienate and marginalize some of our most vulnerable students, it is out of touch with the needs of our schools. [HB 81](#) would prevent teachers and other school staff from using a student's preferred name and pronoun without written consent from the parent. [HB 466](#) would further criminalize any K-12 school employee from discussing sexual orientation or gender identity with students.

Understandably, our members are outraged. Lauren Jewett, a highly lauded special education teacher, wrote:

I believe in advocating for quality education and resources for all. Our job is to welcome and include every kid and family that walks through our school doors. It is also our job to uplift all students for who they are. Kids work hard in their courses and they absolutely deserve strong academic instruction. Equally, they deserve to see themselves in the curriculum. These bills outlaw any books with LGBTQ+ characters, books by LGBTQ+ authors, and books that tell the history of the LGBTQ+ struggle and movement. When kids feel they belong, they are able to learn better and make significant academic growth.

UTNO president Dave Cash added:

In addition to students, all school employees should feel free to be themselves at work. Every educator knows that having strong relationships with students is critical to building a community of trust in the classroom. Imagine not being able to share stories from your own family experiences to connect with those you teach. These bills would have a deeply chilling effect on schools, students, and educators alike.

Louisiana students are frequently bullied or harassed based on perceived or actual sexual orientation and/or gender identity. [A 2017 Louisiana School Climate Survey](#) conducted by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that the majority of students reported hearing homophobic or negative remarks about transgender people from other students and over half heard staff make negative remarks about someone's gender expression. [A study conducted by the Trevor project](#) revealed that almost half of LGBTQ youth in Louisiana considered suicide last year. The support systems we have in place at school could mean the difference between life and death for our most at-risk youth.

UTNO members and the students we teach express a wide variety of sexual orientations and gender identities. We are proud of this diversity in both our membership and our students. We urge all legislators to stand up to these attacks and vote no on both HB 81 and HB 466.