JACKSON, Miss. — Mississippi’s Republican-led Legislature completed a last-ditch effort Thursday to revive a bill to regulate [*transgender people’s use of bathrooms*](https://apnews.com/article/transgender-restrooms-mississippi-aad5b1c1a4a735e9f11ebaa9e416dc4a), locker rooms and dormitories in public education buildings.

Lawmakers pushed the proposal through the House and Senate in the final days of their four-month session after negotiations between the chambers broke down Monday on an earlier proposal. Republicans said they received a flurry of messages urging them to bring the bill back to life.

“This probably, to a lot of our constituents and to a lot of people in this chamber, is probably the most important bill that we brought up,” said Senate President Pro Tempore Dean Kirby, a Republican.

The legislation would require all public education institutions to equip their buildings with single-sex restrooms, changing areas and dormitories.

People would only be allowed to enter spaces that correspond to their sex assigned at birth, regardless of their appearance or any procedures they've had to affirm their gender identity. Those who violate the policy could be sued, but schools, colleges and universities would be protected from liability.

Democrats said the bill would put transgender people at risk. They also criticized Republicans for spending time on the issue as other legislative priorities remained unfinished.

"It just baffles me that we have things we can do to improve the state of Mississippi for all people, for all people, but we get so pumped on something that's national ***politics***," said Rep. Jeffrey Hulum III, a Democrat. “It is not my job to criticize how people live their lives.”

Republicans said they were standing up for female family members on college campuses and pointed to several Republican women, wearing red, as they looked on from the Senate gallery.

One of those women was Anja Baker, a member of the Mississippi Federation of Republican Women from the Jackson suburb of Rankin County. Baker said she works with social service providers and was concerned women would be crowded out of spaces they rely on.

“They only have so many resources, and they need to have their locations and resources protected for the women that need them instead of getting caught in a game of identity ***politics***,” Baker said.

Advocacy groups emailed her and other Republican women late Wednesday urging them to show up Thursday at the Capitol. That came after an initial measure mandating single-sex spaces stalled, causing an embittered back-and-forth between top legislators.

Just before a Monday night deadline, the House offered a plan that would let people file lawsuits seeking monetary damages if someone uses a bathroom not assigned to their gender, said Senate Judiciary A Committee Chairman Brice Wiggins, a Republican. Wiggins said that made it an unacceptable “trial lawyer bill."

House Judiciary A Committee Chairman Joey Hood, also a Republican, said the Senate forced the House into accepting a weaker proposal. The bill would let people sue, but they would be unable to claim compensatory damages from any lawsuit. As a result, Hood and other House members said the bill they ultimately approved would likely fail to deter people from entering spaces that don't align with their sex assigned at birth.

Hood said he hopes the Legislature would introduce legislation in 2025 with stronger penalties.

Another proposal failed this year that would have denied the [*legal recognition of transgender people*](https://apnews.com/article/mississippi-transgender-definitions-state-law-50d49954f718030bc2ca5f75aadc0f2c) by writing into law that “there are only two sexes, and every individual is either male or female.”

In 2021, Republican Gov. Tate Reeves signed legislation to [*ban transgender athletes*](https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-mississippi-discrimination-gender-identity-tate-reeves-9dfa2829f12e5f7efbb1653aaf468941) from competing on girls’ or women’s sports teams. Last year, he signed a bill to [*ban gender-affirming hormones or surgery*](https://apnews.com/article/transgender-health-mississippi-lgbtq-03a51aaf8307889125d264421240ccf4) for anyone younger than 18.

The Mississippi proposals were among [*several bills*](https://apnews.com/article/lgbtq-rights-dont-say-gay-licenses-d0bf9d2f314ec6f28f2189795ea2d56c) being considered in state legislatures around the country as Republicans try to restrict transgender people’s access to gender-affirming care, bathrooms and sports, among other things.

—-

Michael Goldberg is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. Follow him at [*@mikergoldberg*](https://twitter.com/mikergoldberg).