

# [***Rollout of transgender bathroom law sows confusion among Utah public school families***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BXN-XFY1-JC5B-G1J2-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

May 1, 2024 Wednesday 5:47 PM GMT

Copyright 2024 Associated Press All Rights Reserved

**Section:** DOMESTIC NEWS; POLITICAL NEWS; STATE AND REGIONAL

**Length:** 792 words

**Byline:** HANNAH SCHOENBAUM, Associated Press

**Dateline:** SALT LAKE CITY

**Body**

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah public schools have been rushing to prepare students and teachers as the state starts cracking down Wednesday on any school found not enforcing [*new bathroom restrictions*](https://apnews.com/article/utah-transgender-bathroom-access-746d51175ad770623e6f403b426fdc8c) for transgender people.

Residents and visitors are required under state law to use bathrooms and changing rooms in government-owned buildings that correspond with their sex assigned at birth. Although the law took effect when Republican Gov. Spencer Cox signed it Jan. 30, it was not widely enforced before a key compliance mechanism began this week. Schools and government agencies now face steep fines of up to $10,000 per day for each violation.

The rollout has been roiled in confusion for Utah families amid a patchwork of plans that differ across districts. Their [*experiences are mirrored*](https://apnews.com/article/transgender-bathroom-laws-enforcement-e96e94b8935eb6bd23a42562cdeeec6c) in many of the other 10 Republican-led states with similar restroom restrictions. Enforcement of one of those laws — in Idaho — has been put on hold by a court.

Utah state Rep. Kera Birkeland, a Morgan Republican and the bill’s primary sponsor, has argued it’s a necessary safeguard against people who might claim they’re transgender to infiltrate a gendered space. She pitched the law as a safety measure to protect the privacy of women and girls without citing evidence of threats or assaults by trans people against them. Trans residents say she has used a hypothetical to justify exclusion.

Legislators left it up to each school district to decide how it will communicate the changes. Some have held classroom presentations. Others have sent home fact sheets or met privately with families who might be affected.

Despite their different approaches, the state's largest school districts say they share a common goal: make affected individuals feel safe while handling any issues in-house.

Principals in the Granite, Alpine, Davis and Salt Lake City school districts have been trained to address bathroom concerns on an individual basis, with discretion and empathy for LGBTQ+ students, spokespeople for the districts said.

The law requires schools to create “privacy plans” for those who do not feel comfortable using group bathrooms, but Graham Beeton, 11, said such accommodations can be isolating. The Salt Lake City fifth grader, who uses he/they pronouns, said he feels loved by his classmates and does not understand why the government cares which bathroom he uses.

“It hurts me,” Beeton said. “I might be uncomfortable going into that restroom, so I want to go into a different one, but the law doesn’t say that I can.”

Trans people in Utah may only use facilities that align with their gender identity if they’ve legally changed the gender on their birth certificate and undergone certain gender-affirming surgeries, which are rarely performed on minors.

Draped in an LGBTQ+ pride flag with rainbows painted on his cheeks, Beeton beckoned his classmates to a block party held just across the street from Bonneville Elementary School on Monday afternoon. With teachers in all Salt Lake City schools set to present about the bathroom law, his mom and many other parents pulled their kids out early and threw a party in support of affected students and staff.

Among them was Mia Norman, an emergency room technician and the mother of twins, who said she did not understand how the law could realistically be enforced on children. She worried kids and their parents might be encouraged to snitch on school administrators and vulnerable students.

Norman and other parents said the rollout this week has led to tough conversations with their kids about how ***politics*** can impact their lives at a young age.

Fourth grade students Lila and Sophia left the presentation confused about why the law existed and worried that it might make some of their peers feel bad about themselves. They were told to approach a teacher with any questions about which bathroom they should use and to report instances of bullying, according to a copy of the presentation obtained by The Associated Press.

“There shouldn’t be a law in place to tell people who they can be or to stop feeling how they want to feel,” said 10-year-old Lila Hathaway.

Bree Taylor-Lof, a transgender teacher, left school on the verge of tears Monday after having to present to students about a policy that affected them personally. They fought to keep their emotions in check while fielding questions from confused fifth graders who did not understand why the law had been passed.

Realizing that the restrictions would affect their teacher, many of the kids gave Taylor-Lof hugs and handwritten cards on their way out the door.

“Our youth today have a keen sense for justice and inclusion and looking out for each other," Taylor-Lof said. “That was clear in the concern that they expressed about their fellow peers, and for me.”

**Load-Date:** May 1, 2024

**End of Document**