



The Marion County School Board at Thursday's meeting. Four of the five members showed their support of restricting school bathrooms to birth sex. (James Torrez/WUFT News)

MARION COUNTY LIKELY TO ENFORCE BIRTH SEX FOR BATHROOMS

By James Torrez

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Transgender students in Marion County will likely be required to soon use the restrooms of their birth sex rather than the restrooms of their choosing.

Four of the Marion County School Board's five members leaned toward that decision at Thursday's meeting, but Chair Bobby James, the lone clear dissenter, said he thinks the board is making a decision too quickly.

James suggested developing a process, rather than a single rule, that would allow the board to handle such matters on a case-by-case basis.

"When a student wants to be in a gifted program, we have a procedure," he said at Thursday's meeting. "When a student wants to be in AP classes, we have a procedure."

The issue arose after a student from Vanguard High School, born female, entered a men's restroom at the Ocala school because she identifies as a male.

This sparked controversy in the community, board members said Thursday, with some arguing that

bathrooms should be restricted to the biological birth sex of the student and others saying gender identity played a part.

Drafts of two conflicting resolutions were presented at the meeting: one restricting restroom access based on birth sex, and another prohibiting sex discrimination in restrooms based on gender identity and gender nonconformity.

Members didn't take a vote on either resolution because the meeting was a work session. But they did come to a consensus to approve the first resolution — on restricting access based on birth sex — at their meeting on Tuesday, April 26, at 5:30 p.m. at 512 SE Third Street in Ocala.

Board member Nancy Stacy clashed with James often throughout the meeting, pointing out when the chair was expressing his opinion while still possessing the gavel. (The chairman is expected to act as only a mediator to the board during sessions while holding the gavel.)

Stacy clearly favored restricting access based on birth sex.

"Our constituents fully expect us to do our job," she said. "This school board stands taller than any other in Florida."

The three other board members — Angie Boynton, Carol Ely and Vice-Chair Kelly King — also made their support of the restriction apparent.

"I fully support to restrict restroom access to birth-sex identity," King said.

"I'm totally against letting transgender students inside opposite-sex bathrooms," Ely said.

During public comment on the topic, about a dozen citizens showed their support for restricting access based on birth sex, while one opposed it.

"It's important to me that you've taken a stand," Marion County resident Hal Phillips said to the four in support of the resolution restricting access. "I thank you for standing up for what's right."

Resident Sara Clifton, the lone citizen in opposition, asked the board to give the safety of transgender students more consideration.



Marion County residents gather at Thursday's school board meeting. About a dozen citizens spoke in favor of restricting bathroom access to birth sex, while one was against it. (James Torrez/WUFT News)

“We are tasked with protecting all students of Marion County,” she said. “But the students I haven’t seen mentioned today, as far as safety is concerned, are those who identify as transgendered.”

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Way to go Marion county you got it right! Thank you!

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