

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana



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June 28, 2023

VIA HAND DELIVERY

Honorable Clay J. Schexnayder
Speaker of the House
Louisiana House of Representatives
Post Office Box 94062
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804-9062

RECEIVED
JUN 30 2023
4:14 PM
House of Representatives
Clerk's Office

RE: Veto of House Bill 81 of the 2023 Regular Session

Dear Speaker Schexnayder:

Please be advised that I have vetoed House Bill 81 of the 2023 Regular Session.

At its core, this bill is yet another example of a string of discriminatory bills being pushed by extreme groups around the country under the guise of religious freedom. But even if you accept the proponents' religious freedom argument, the bill is still fraught with serious, practical implementation issues.

As finally passed, every parent whose child goes by a nickname, rather than the name on their birth certificate, would have to provide written permission to the school to allow an employee of the school to use the child's nickname rather than his given name. The bill defines "student" as a public school student under the age of 18. Even just as it pertains to being called by a nickname, does this mean the parents of a 17 year old public school student would have to provide permission to the school for employees to use the nickname, but an 18 year old student at the same public school can go by a different name not on his birth certificate without requiring parental consent?

Even further, this legislation would only apply to public and charter schools, meaning children attending private school can be called by a name or pronoun other than that on their birth certificate without a parent's written permission? Are the same religious freedom protections for public school employees this bill alleges to address not extended to employees at private schools?

While there is an attempt to provide safeguards for a child who may have a nickname or a pronoun that a school employee refuses to use for religious and moral reasons, the bill falls woefully short of actually protecting the child. As finally passed, the legislation allows the parent in these instances to request that the child be transferred to another teacher's classroom. But not only is the school not required to transfer, what happens in a small school, in a rural district, where

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there is no other class to be transferred to or even another school in the district for the child to be transferred to? Where does the child go to be educated?

I believe this legislation is rooted in discrimination. But even considering the argument for religious freedom, the drafting of this bill is so flawed and leaves the reader with so many questions that it will not become law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Bel Edwards". The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and is positioned above the printed name and title.

John Bel Edwards
Governor

enclosure

cc: Honorable Patrick Page Cortez
Louisiana Senate President