



## Fla. conservatives fight transgender restroom rule

By RON WORD  
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*GAINESVILLE* - A blond girl heads from a playground into a women's restroom. A scruffy man, lurking outside, darts in behind her. "Your City Commission Made This Legal," the words on the television screen read.

The dark ad came from opponents of a gender identity provision added last year to the city's anti-discrimination ordinance, which now allows the city's transgender residents to use whichever restroom they are most comfortable using.

Foes want to repeal the new protection with a March 24 ballot measure that has divided Gainesville.

Those who support the transgender protections say their opponents are really unleashing a broader attack on the rights of gay, lesbian and transgender individuals in general.

The City Commission approved the provision by a 4-3 vote a year ago. Before the ink could dry, opponents angrily began working for its repeal.

"You are trying to operate in a realm you do not have the authority to operate in," one pastor, George Brantley, told the commissioners.

The debate is expected to become noisier as the vote nears, with opponents resorting to more TV ads and campaigns pegged to such slogans as "Keep Men out of Women's Restrooms and vice versa."

Organizations defending transgender rights are mustering their own campaign.

**The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force notes that 108 cities and counties nationwide have similar transgender protections.** An attempt to repeal an ordinance in Montgomery County, Md., failed when a court ruled opponents did not collect enough signatures to place it on the ballot.

Citizens for Good Public Policy, the group behind the commercial that aired last summer in Gainesville, collected more than 6,000 signatures last summer to win a referendum. If approved, the repeal measure will also prevent the commission from adding protections beyond what the state requires: race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability and marital status.

Cain Davis, chairman of Citizens for Good Public Policy, said the issue is about regulating a "government gone wild" and ensuring public safety, charging that sexual predators could now simply enter a women's restroom claiming to be a transgender individual.

"We know when men go into women's restrooms, bad things can happen," Davis said.

City Commissioner Crag Lowe, leader of a group called Equality is Gainesville's Business, called the ads from Davis' group a grossly distorted attempt to whip up fears.

Lowe's group believes anti-discrimination protections for people who change their sexual orientation are good for business and foster diversity. He noted that 433 of the Fortune 500 companies have policies covering sexual orientation and 153 cover gender identity.

Since the ordinance took effect, police have reported no problems in public restrooms stemming from the law.

Retired postal worker Donna Lee, 60, who had gender reassignment surgery in 2001, moved to Gainesville from Ocala last March after hearing about the anti-discrimination ordinance.

"We just want to live our lives with the basic civil rights that everyone else has," she said.

But some are taking no chances.

Computer programmer Clare Holman, who was born male but now lives as a female, said she simply stays away from public toilets.