

Trans-less ENDA put on hold

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House Speaker Nancy Pelosi will postpone advancing the latest version of the Employment Nondiscrimination Act that includes protections for gay men and lesbians but excludes transgender people, her office said Monday.

The bill was scheduled for markup in committee Tuesday, at which point it would have been sent to the House floor for a vote.

"After discussions with congressional leaders and organizations supporting passage of ENDA, we have agreed to schedule mark-up of the bill in the Committee on Education and Labor later this month, followed by a vote in the full House," Pelosi, D-San Francisco, said in the statement.

"This schedule will allow proponents of the legislation to continue their discussions with members in the interest of passing the broadest possible bill."

The move was a nod to a critical mass of LGBT activists who adamantly opposed advancing a measure without trans protections.

The bill originally co-sponsored by Reps. Barney Frank, D-Mass., and Tammy Baldwin, D-Wisc., would have made it illegal to discriminate in the workplace on the basis of both sexual orientation and gender identity.

It was split in two last week when Democratic House leaders feared it could not pass based on the trans-inclusive language. Baldwin declined to put her name on the bifurcated bill.

More than 90 organizations signed a letter delivered Monday to Pelosi that urged her to postpone action on the substitute legislation.

"We ask you to keep working with us on an Employment Non-Discrimination Act that protects everyone in our community, and to oppose any substitute legislation that leaves some of us behind," read the letter, which included signatories such as the National Center for Transgender Equality, The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and Lambda Legal.

The Human Rights Campaign signed a similar letter to House Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller, also Monday, that called the trans-free bill a "mistake" and urged its cancellation.

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, sent out a statement of support for Pelosi's postponement.

"We appreciate that a decision has been made to slow down this process," he said, "and we look forward to working with Congress over the upcoming weeks to educate them as to why this substitute bill is seriously flawed, convince them to abandon this strategy, and instead advance a fully inclusive ENDA later this month." (The Advocate)