

Republican Utah lawmakers abandon dueling bills on changing the gender on a person's government documents

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Utah lawmakers will not consider how and whether a person can change the gender on their birth certificate or driver license this year after the sponsors of two competing bills on the subject abandoned their legislation on Thursday.

Both Rep. Merrill Nelson, R-Grantsville, and Rep. Todd Weiler, R-Woods Cross, agreed to defer consideration of their proposals, according to a press release issued by House and Senate Republican staff.

"After discussions with various groups and individuals," the release stated, "Rep. Nelson and Sen. Weiler, sponsors of the two vital statistics bills, have agreed to hold the bills and refer them and related issues to interim study."

One of those bills, Nelson's HB153, had been scheduled to be heard in committee Thursday afternoon but was removed from the agenda early Thursday morning.

The bill generated accusations of transphobia for its intention to ban Utahns from changing their listed gender on birth certificates, and was broadly criticized for its description of gender, which defined women as having anatomy for "providing eggs and receiving sperm from a male donor."

On Wednesday, Nelson announced that he had written a substitute version of the bill, which eliminated the controversial gender description and would have allowed Utahns to change the gender on their driver licenses, but not on their birth certificates.

"This substitute bill reflects input from various interested parties and provides a workable resolution of the issues presented," Nelson said Wednesday in a prepared statement. "Those who assert a different gender identity from the sex on their birth certificate are free to designate that identity on their driver license, which is used as the most common form of personal identification."

Weiler's bill, by contrast, sought to establish a consistent process for Utahns to change their listed genders. The current practice is unaddressed in state code, leading to inconsistent rulings in the state's courts as petitioners request to have their government-issued documents amended.

Weiler said Thursday that the issue is a difficult one that faces many obstacles, but that the state, at some point, must address.

"I told my leadership before the session that I would not run the bill this year unless a consensus was reached," Weiler said. "That didn't happen."