

Utah transgender athlete bill coming back, but sponsor plans to do things differently

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SALT LAKE CITY (KUTV) — The controversial Utah [transgender athlete bill](#) will be back next session, but exactly how it looks remains to be determined, its sponsor says.

Rep. Kera Birkeland (R-Morgan) told 2News in an interview Monday afternoon she intends to bring the measure back to the Utah Legislature but plans to handle things differently than this past session.

“I had a lot of LGBTQ allies on this bill, but it was somewhat rushed just because, being a new legislator, I didn’t navigate the process as well as I hope to this year,” said Birkeland, who was appointed to her seat in April 2020 and won election a few months later.



Rep. Kera Birkeland (R-Morgan) told 2News she intends to bring a measure to bar transgender girls from competing in sports back to the Utah Legislature. (File photo: KUTV)

The original bill introduced by Birkeland, which [passed the House of Representatives](#) 50 to 23, would have barred transgender girls from participating in sports for girls in elementary and secondary schools. It sparked heated backlash and an [emotional veto threat](#) from Gov. Spencer Cox, a fellow Republican. A later version of the bill, which would have allowed transgender girls to practice on girls' sports teams but not compete, was [rejected by a Senate committee](#).

Gov. Spencer Cox gets emotional when asked about legislation to bar transgender girls from competing in K-12 sports in Utah, threatens veto. (File photo: KUTV)

Birkeland said next year's bill would likely "look similar to how it looked before," but she said she is seeking a compromise with some groups who opposed it before committing to specific language. "I'm trying to not put specific parameters on it so that it really is an open discussion where people feel like their input is going to matter," she said, adding that she wants to open "more communication opportunities for people."

The goal of her bill, Birkeland said, is "to make sure that we don't allow someone with a competitive advantage to displace a woman, and if that is going to be somebody who has high levels of testosterone because they were born as a man, then let's discuss what that is going to look like."

The ACLU of Utah, one of the organizations which opposed the bill last session, told 2News it will keep tabs on efforts going forward.

"We will continue to communicate with the sponsor and work closely with our allies during the interim session on any legislation that impacts transgender youth," said Marina Lowe, the organization's legislative and policy counsel.

Troy Williams is the executive director of Equality Utah. (File photo: KUTV)

Equality Utah also opposed the bill earlier this year. When it failed in the Senate committee, executive director Troy Williams issued a statement declaring victory but also praising Birkeland for her passion for women's sports and expressing hope that he could work with her in the future.

In a text message Monday to 2News, Williams said,

We have been searching high and low for transgender student athletes in Utah schools, but so far we have not been able to find any. Still, we believe that transgender kids can benefit from the many pro-social skills learned in school sports. Utah schools should provide opportunity for all children, including our remarkable transgender youth.