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Senate Democratic Leader Lauren Book and Representative Rita Harris File Legislation to Protect Gay and Transgender Floridians

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. - In recognition of October's LGBTQ History Month, **Senate Minority Leader Lauren Book (D-Davie)** and **Representative Rita Harris (D-Orlando)** filed **Senate Bill 156** and **House Bill 137**, cited the "Gay and Transgender Panic Legal Defenses Prohibition Act."

If passed, **SB 156/HB 137** would prohibit the use of "gay and transgender panic" defenses in court. According to the [American Bar Institution](#), these defenses seek to partially or completely excuse crimes such as murder and assault on the grounds that the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity is to blame for the defendant's violent reaction. Though no state explicitly allows these panic defenses, defendants across the country have used these defenses during trials.

"As lawmakers, our duty is to create a society that values and protects every individual, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity," says **Leader Lauren Book**. "The 'panic' defense is an affront to justice, allowing perpetrators to evade accountability for heinous acts based on prejudice. This legislation is a crucial step in safeguarding the rights of LGBTQ+ Floridians, sending a clear message that hate has no place in our courts or our communities."

The [Movement Advancement Project](#) cites that 17 states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation that prohibits the use of legal defenses claiming the victim's sexual orientation and/or gender identity contributed to the defendant's actions. Most recently, the State of New Hampshire implemented a similar policy, which was signed

into law by Republican Governor Chris Sununu.

“This is common sense legislation that protects Florida’s LGBTQ+ citizens so that direct hate against them may not stand up in court. In a time when gay and transgender Floridians are under attack by extremist politicians, it is our responsibility as lawmakers to stand up for this community. It is well past time for politicians to stop vilifying the LGBTQ+ community and stand against hate. As lawmakers, the least we can do is prohibit homophobia and transphobia from being used as valid excuses in the judiciary,” said **Representative Harris**.

If passed, this bill would take effect July 1, 2024. Florida’s legislative session is set to begin on January 9, 2024.

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