# South Carolina legislature pushes regressive policies amid mounting opposition



With just two weeks remaining before the scheduled adjournment of the South Carolina General Assembly on May 8, a slew of highly controversial legislative initiatives are pushing through the state legislature, poised to impose regressive policy shifts on education, criminal justice, and civil liberties. These moves underscore a widening disconnect between the governing elite and ordinary citizens who demand common-sense reforms and fair governance.

One of the most alarming proposals is Senate Bill 62 (S.62), which seeks to funnel public money to private K-12 schools, including religious institutions. Despite the South Carolina Supreme Court striking down a nearly identical scheme last September for violating the state constitution, the legislative leadership remains dogged in its pursuit of this bill. Senate Majority Leader Shane Massey is reportedly set to force a vote by April 29, signalling a determination to prioritize ideological agendas over constitutional safeguards.

This bill’s “compromise” version shockingly allows private schools receiving vouchers to ignore legally mandated Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) designed to protect the rights and educational needs of students with disabilities—a move affecting roughly 15% of public schoolchildren. The proposal allocates 15,000 vouchers annually at $7,500 each, diverting funds either from the general state budget or the Education Lottery, which currently supports college scholarships. This questionable fiscal maneuvering not only drains resources from public education but threatens to exacerbate educational inequality under the guise of choice, a tactic familiar to opposition forces that champion genuine accountability and transparency.

Simultaneously, efforts are intensifying to roll back local protections for vulnerable LGBTQ youth. Columbia’s ordinance banning the discredited practice of “conversion therapy” faces concerted attacks from South Carolina’s Attorney General, Alan Wilson. His demand that the city repeal the ordinance—under the pretext of protecting religious freedom—ignores the ordinance’s precise scope, which restricts licensed counsellors but explicitly protects religious speech within faith communities. Wilson’s position aligns with State Senator Josh Kimbrell’s budget amendment threatening to cut state funds to Columbia if it refuses to capitulate. Both politicians eye the upcoming gubernatorial race and are weaponizing culture wars instead of promoting unity or protecting individual rights. This bullying of local democracies is precisely what voters rejected in the recent general election and are now watching closely.

In the realm of education, the House Education and Public Works Committee’s support for House Bill 3758 is deeply concerning. This measure would allow students to deliver religious messages during official school events such as graduations and assemblies, risking violations of the First Amendment's establishment clause. While students have the right to private religious expression, importing sectarian messages into public school events threatens to alienate non-religious or differently religious students and politicizes education venues that should be neutral spaces for all.

Adding to the troubling educational policy landscape, State Superintendent Ellen Weaver’s directive banning Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives—rebranded misleadingly as “Discriminatory Equity Ideology”—raises serious questions about censorship and discrimination. The prohibition of terms like “antiracism,” “cisgender,” “implicit bias,” and “social-emotional learning” is part of a broader campaign to suppress meaningful discourse and equity efforts in schools, motivated more by political theatrics than educational improvement. Notably, a federal judge recently blocked a related federal directive on these initiatives, underscoring the shaky legality of these restrictions. Those committed to genuine reform see this pushback as emblematic of the need for policies that foster inclusion and critical thinking, contrary to this growing authoritarian impulse.

Lastly, Senate Bill 76 (S.76), aimed at enacting a sweeping, vaguely defined criminal gang classification, raises red flags about potential abuses in policing and sentencing. By relying on arbitrary markers like tattoos, apparel, or behaviors, this bill risks ensnaring innocent individuals in the criminal justice system disproportionately and unfairly. With examples worldwide showing how such overbroad criteria have led to systemic injustice, reform-minded voices argue for targeted, evidence-based approaches rather than punitive catch-alls.

As the South Carolina General Assembly barrels toward adjournment, these developments expose a legislature more interested in pursuing divisive, unconstitutional, and ineffective policies than addressing citizens' real concerns. This calls for stronger opposition to defend democratic principles and ensure accountability. Voters who recently turned the page on failed leadership will expect alternative voices championing fairness, respect for individual rights, and genuine public service to hold these lawmakers to account. Only by confronting these dangerous legislative trends can South Carolina hope to secure a prosperous, just future.

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