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Gov. Ned Lamont signed three laws Tuesday supporting the state's LGBTQ community. Here's what they do.

By TESS VRBIN
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This year's legislative session was one of the most successful for the LGBTQ community in Connecticut, state Rep. Jeff Currey said Tuesday at a ceremonial bill signing for three provisions he helped champion.

The two new laws and a section of the state budget creating an LGBTQ health network were previously signed into law, but the ceremony in Gov. Ned Lamont's office drew lawmakers and advocates who stood beside the governor and in front of a rainbow flag.

Connecticut's progress comes in light of federal rollbacks of rights and protections for LGBTQ Americans, said Gretchen Raffa, director of public policy and advocacy for Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. President Donald Trump's administration has banned transgender people from serving in the military and allowed doctors to refuse to provide certain medical care if they have moral or religious objections.

"(I want to) remind everyone that there is still so much work that we need to be doing to protect the most vulnerable within the LGBTQ community," Raffa said.

Here are explanations of the three new statutes:



Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz, left, hands a pen to state Rep. Jeff Currey, D-East Hartford, third from left, while Gov. Ned Lamont, seated, signs three bills that support Connecticut's LGBTQ residents. Currey and Rep. Raghieb Allie-Brennan, D-Bethel, far right, were the House's strongest supporters of the legislation. (Tess Vrbin)

HIV prevention for LGBTQ minors

Sexually active minors could not access HIV prevention medication without parental consent in Connecticut.

Advocates worked on the legislation for four years, but testimony from New Haven resident Sam Smith, 21, to the public health committee in February "turned the tide on this legislation," Currey said.

Smith knew about the daily pill called pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, when he was in high school but did not feel comfortable telling his parents he was gay. He was diagnosed with HIV shortly before graduating high school in May 2016.

One in every five new HIV infections nationwide occur in young people between 13 and 24 years of age, and gay and bisexual males receive 80 percent of those diagnoses, said Krystn Wagner, an HIV physician at the Fair Haven Community Health Center in New Haven. Wagner worked on the legislation with Jay Sicklick and Alice Rosenthal, both attorneys for the Medical-Legal Partnership Project at the Center for Children's Advocacy.

"At the heart of this bill being signed today by Gov. Lamont are the needs of LGBTQ teens who are unable or not

yet ready to come forward to their parents or guardians to disclose their status,” Wagner said.

Ban on ‘gay panic’ defense

Connecticut is one of six states to ban the use of someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity as justification for a defendant’s violent reaction in criminal cases. California, Rhode Island and Illinois already had a ban on the so-called gay panic defense before this year, Nevada banned it in May and New York banned it on June 30.

“No person is justified in using force upon another person which would otherwise constitute an offense based solely on the discovery of, knowledge about or potential disclosure of the victim’s actual or perceived sex, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression,” the bill states.

Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney, D-New Haven, said in testimony to the judiciary committee in March that the gay or transgender panic defense has lessened charges and sentences for some perpetrators of violent crimes.

“Carried to its logical extreme, a defendant could seek to use irrational bigotry as a defense against charges of violence directed at any racial, ethnic or religious group,” he said.

LGBTQ health network

Connecticut is the first state to statutorily create an LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network, Currey said. The \$43 billion state budget, which Lamont signed last month, includes \$250,000 a year for the next two years to fund the network within the state Department of Public Health.

The network and the DPH will conduct an analysis to identify and meet areas of need for LGBTQ citizens throughout the state, and the DPH will award grants to organizations that help meet those needs, according to the budget.

Patrick Dunn, the executive director of the New Haven Pride Center, said he has seen vast differences in access to services for LGBTQ people of particular identities.

“You can go to New Haven and have access to a community center, three bars and health services, but then you can go three towns over and there’s literally nothing, particularly if you are a person of color, transgender or don’t speak English as your first or native language,” said Dunn, whose position is included in the budget’s list of network members.