

Cossacks Should Be Allowed to Flog Gays, Siberian Lawmaker Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A human rights group from the Zabaikalsky region has asked regional prosecutors to look into a homophobic comment made by lawmaker Alexander Mikhailov, Interfax reported Thursday.

Regional deputy Mikhailov said members of the Cossack community should be allowed to physically punish gay people by flogging them in public with a leather whip. He said homosexuals were responsible for many of the country's problems and should be put to shame.

Vitaly Cherkasov, head of the Zabaikalsky Human Rights Center, said he believed that Mikhailov's words could help incite hatred toward the gay community among locals. The regional prosecutor's office said it would respond to the group's request to evaluate the legality of the comment.

Several killings in which homophobia is the suspected motive have been reported around Russia in recent months, amid the passage of anti-gay legislation that rights activists and foreign governments have slammed as discriminatory.

Mikhailov's comments came days before a bill introducing stiff fines for portraying homosexuality in a positive light to children was signed into law by President Vladimir Putin.

But according to a recent poll conducted by the independent Levada Center, the so-called "gay propaganda" bill is supported by 76 percent of Russians.

Eighty percent of the survey's respondents said they had no gay friends, while 50 percent said their attitude toward a friend would change if they discovered that he or she were gay.

The pollster interviewed 1,601 people in 45 regions for the survey, which had a 3.4 percent margin of error.

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