

Olympics Wins Exemption From Anti-Gay Law

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The International Olympic Committee says it has received assurances from Russia's government that athletes and spectators at next year's Winter Olympics in Sochi will be exempt from a controversial law banning anything deemed to promote homosexuality.

Since it was signed into law by President Vladimir Putin last month, the legislation targeting so-called homosexual propaganda has attracted calls from activists around the world to boycott Russia's first Winter Olympics.

"As a sporting organization, what we can do is to continue to work to ensure that the Games can take place without discrimination against athletes, officials, spectators and the media," the IOC said in an e-mailed statement Friday.

"To that end, the IOC has received assurances from the highest level of government in Russia that the legislation will not affect those attending or taking part in the games."

The IOC added that "this legislation has just been passed into law, and it remains to be seen whether and how it will be implemented, particularly as regards the games in Sochi."

While the law's proponents argue it is aimed at protecting children from harmful influences, critics allege the move is part of a broader crackdown on Russia's gay community.

Russia has come under international criticism, including from the European Court of Human Rights, for its treatment of gay people.

Some gay bars in North America have reportedly refused to stock Russian vodka as a sign of protest at the law.

Earlier in the week, four Dutch filmmakers were arrested and detained near the northwest Russian city of Murmansk over an alleged breach of the law. The four were later freed.

Last year, a Russian court turned down an application to register a nongovernmental organization that would set up a Pride House in Sochi, a building dedicated to supporting gay athletes and informing the public about gay rights. A similar building, also called Pride House, was a high-profile presence at the last Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

In her ruling, Judge Svetlana Mordovina said that allowing such a building to operate in Sochi would destabilize Russia and weaken its sovereignty by encouraging Russians to have fewer children.

The law levies fines for such offenses from 4,000 rubles (\$120) to 5,000 rubles (\$150) for individuals and from 40,000 to 50,000 rubles for officials.

Legal entities may also be suspended for 90 days for the promotion of "non-traditional sexual relations" toward children.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov could not be immediately reached for comment.

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