

Law

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Boucher, executive director of Trans Liberty, said the new law is a huge blow to the transgender community.

"I've been doing this for over a decade," Boucher said. "I've been working in trans rights advocacy and this is the most aggressive and deep cut at the community that I've ever seen."

The new bill also retroactively revoked transgender people's drivers license and required them to get new documentation that would state their assigned birth sex.

"They have revoked thousands of people's driver's licenses, and that renders people as essentially stateless," Boucher said.

"So, that's why (Trans Liberty) issued what we're calling an evacuation warning because those people are not safe to even drive down the road. They can't vote. They can't get on the plane. They're pretty much stuck."

Boucher said part of the reason she chose March 31 was because it was Transgender Visibility Day.

"Trans Visibility Day for many in our community, a celebratory day," Boucher said. "In the past, it has generally been that way, but the state government of Kansas has literally erased the records of thousands of their citizens and has rendered them invisible.

"They couldn't drive here to do this if they wanted to and so I, holding a Colorado driver's license and having access to national press and comms team, am able to drag that spotlight back to Kansas."

Boucher said if the law stays in place it could encourage other states to follow suit or signal to other states already trying. Idaho passed a bill that would also ban transgender people from using their preferred bathroom in any public space and make it a misdemeanor on the first offense and a felony on the second.

"I think that what's happening here is extremely dangerous, both to the people that are here, and setting a precedent for other states to follow," Boucher said.

Transgender activist calls out bathroom ban bill to Gov. Laura Kelly

Moments before violating the law, Boucher approached Kelly as she was finishing an event on the second-floor rotunda in the Statehouse. The two exchanged a short conversation where Boucher critiqued the law and told Kelly she planned on violating it. Kelly offered her luck and shook her hand.

Boucher told The Capital-Journal as far as she knows Kelly has been an ally to the overall queer community, including transgender Kansans.

"I think her heart is in the right place and I think that she knows just as well as anyone that the attacks targeting our community are a political stunt to make a particular group of people happy at our expense," Boucher told The Capital-Journal reporter in the women's restroom. "I think that anyone with the level of empathy that she has and others have, I'm sure there are many in the state Legislature what voted for that bill who privately don't agree with it.

"So I think and would hope they reconsider."

Stacey Saldanha-Olson is an enterprise reporter for The Topeka Capital-Journal. She can be reached by email at solson@usatodayco.com. Follow her on X @ssaldanha.

BIRTHS

Stormont Vail
Carly Masenthin and Eric Smith, Topeka, girl, March 31
Savanna Good and Stephen Burghart II, Topeka, girl, March 31

CORRECTION

Abilene's Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum & Boyhood Home is two miles south of Interstate 70 at exit 275. A story in Tuesday's edition had the direction wrong. The Capital-Journal regrets the error.

Transgender activist defies Kansas bathroom law

Jason Alatidd and Stacey Saldanha-Olson

Topeka Capital-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

A national transgender activist has defied the state's new transgender bathroom ban by using a female restroom at the Kansas Statehouse.

Samantha Boucher, who lives in Colorado and is the executive director of Trans Liberty, used a second-floor bathroom at the Capitol in Topeka in protest of Senate Bill 244. Boucher described it as an act of civil disobedience.

The new law was enacted in February by Republican supermajorities in the Legislature by overriding a veto of Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly. It bans transgender people from using bathrooms and other facilities in public buildings that align with their gender identity.

Violators can face civil lawsuits, and repeat offenders can face misdemeanor criminal charges.

"I think this would be extremely dangerous for a Kansan to do, but ... I'm more than happy to put myself at that risk if it means that somebody else doesn't have to, because eventually someone would try this," Boucher told The Capital-Journal.

Beforehand, she said she is "absolutely" prepared for any legal action her restroom use may lead to.

"I'm really interested to see what the attorney general chooses to do here," she said.



Transgender activist Samantha Boucher speaks to Gov. Laura Kelly before using a women's restroom at the Kansas Statehouse in defiance of the state's transgender bathroom ban. JASON ALATIDD/THE CAPITAL-JOURNAL

Boucher informed Capitol Police in advance. A supervisor told The Capital-Journal that it was a civil matter and any complaints would go through the Kansas Department of Administration.

After first trying to go up a staircase across the hall from the Rebel Women mural in the Statehouse, Boucher and a group of about a dozen activists came across an unrelated event led by the governor on the second floor.

Boucher approached Kelly and informed her of her civil disobedience plans.

"I appreciate your veto of that bill," Boucher told Kelly before adding, "Your Legislature has, to date, passed the single-worst" law affecting transgender people. SB 244 also revoked IDs, making invalid the driver's licenses and birth certificates of more than 1,000

Kansans who had changed their gender marker.

"I am very sorry that you and others have been put in this situation," Kelly said.

Boucher likened her cause to that of abolitionist John Brown and the desegregationist plaintiffs in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Before using the bathroom — which a Capitol Police officer helped her find — Boucher said "now we will see if the attorney general chooses to enforce the law that he's passed as I violate it, as a trans woman, just over here."

Jason Alatidd is a Statehouse reporter for The Topeka Capital-Journal. He can be reached by email at jalatidd@usatodayco.com. Follow him on X @Jason_Alatidd.

How to operate ATVs and dirt bikes legally

Stacey Saldanha-Olson

Topeka Capital-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

With warm weather comes an array of such activities as driving dirt bikes and ATVs.

In preparation of this, the Topeka Police Department put out information on how to stay safe and within the law while operating these vehicles.

"Operating ATVs and dirt bikes on city streets is not only illegal in many cases, it creates serious safety risks for everyone on the road," police chief Chris Vallejo said in a statement. "Our

priority is protecting the public, and we will continue to enforce these laws to reduce preventable injuries and crashes."

What does the law say about operating ATVs and dirt bikes?

Following are laws, requirements and applicable offenses and/or fines related to operating an ATV or dirt bike on city streets:

- Driving an ATV on city streets is a traffic infraction and has a \$70 fine.

- If you're illegally operating a "low-speed" vehicle like an ATV or a dirt bike, it can carry a \$70 fine depending

on the case.

- Operating a dirt bike without a valid, up-to-date Class M motorcycle license is a Class B misdemeanor, which has a \$150 fine.

- Dirt bikes driven on public roadways must meet have headlamps, stop lamps and other required safety equipment. If they don't comply with the law, it's a traffic infraction with a \$70 fine.

- Driving a motor vehicle without insurance is a Class B misdemeanor and a \$300 fine if it is your first offense. If it is your second or subsequent offense, it's a Class A misdemeanor and an \$800 fine.

'Cicada' COVID variant detected in 25 states

Mary Walrath-Holdridge

USA TODAY

A "highly mutated" COVID-19 variant that has been detected in at least 25 states is gaining traction, according to health authorities.

Nicknamed "Cicada," BA.3.2 is currently on the list of variants being tracked by both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization, as its spread picked up internationally late last year. Though it was first detected in 2024, it only recently started accounting for a notable number of infections, ballooning to represent up to 30% of COVID infections in some Eastern European countries as of February.

Experts have said the mutated nature of BA.3.2 makes it more effective at evading current vaccination formulations and immune systems that have built a resistance to other COVID infections. This has the potential to cause another "summer surge" in the coming months.

"Cicada" is a nickname given to BA.3.2, a COVID variant. It was first detected in a person who did not live in but was traveling to the United States from abroad in June 2025 and was nicknamed after the rarely emerging insects because it has largely remained undetected or "underground" since its discovery, said Dr. Robert H. Hopkins Jr., medical director of the National



The variant is considered "highly mutated." GETTY IMAGES

Foundation for Infectious Diseases.

The first local case in a U.S. patient was diagnosed in January, he said. Between then and the latest available data from Feb. 11, it was detected in wastewater samples from 132 sites across at least 25 states, according to the CDC. The variant was also present in samples from travelers' voluntary nose swabs. Cases began increasing worldwide in September 2025.

The variant is considered "highly mutated," as its 70-75 mutations make it distinct from the JN.1 lineage, which has been the source of the predominant U.S. strains over the last two years, according to Hopkins.

Like most other variants, the CDC said, the symptoms of the Cicada variant may include runny or stuffy nose, fever, headache, fatigue, sneezing, sore throat, coughing, muscle pain or body

aches, vomiting, diarrhea or changes to the sense of smell or taste.

"I have not seen any data which indicates that Cicada is any more severe than other circulating variants," Hopkins said. "Severe sore throat is reported as a common symptom along with other typical COVID symptoms."

The only sure way to determine if you have the flu, COVID or another respiratory illness is to get tested. According to the CDC, you generally cannot tell the difference between flu and COVID by the symptoms alone, because so many overlap.

COVID infections also tend to appear a bit later after exposure than the flu. Whereas symptoms typically appear one to four days after exposure for flu, COVID symptoms can appear two to five days, and even up to 14 days, after infection.

While mutations could mean existing COVID boosters may not prevent infection as effectively, they can still offer protection against severe disease and death.

"When sick, get tested. If positive, stay home until better and confirm with a negative test. If that's not possible, wear a fit N95 mask," Rajendram Rajnarayanan, assistant dean of research and associate professor at the New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine at Arkansas State University, told USA TODAY.

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