

Kristin Nelson

1/27/25

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District 46

DO NOT PASS HB 1144

Chairman Ruby and members of the House Human Services Committee:

I am reaching out again urging a **DO NOT PASS** recommendation on HB 1144. After reading testimony in favor of this bill, I am inclined to ask the committee to consider why the bill sponsors do not believe single stall, completely private bathrooms are less safe than multi-stall, semi-private bathrooms many buildings have now. These bathrooms can have up to an inch or more of space between the door and the partition allowing anyone coming or going to invade the privacy of the user. Again, I am unsure why those who favor this bill believe this is a better option for our students.

Offering students complete privacy while they complete their own personal care routines can do a lot to promote safety and security in our schools. Staff would be able to monitor the restroom area easier if these spaces are more open, and not closed off in its own space. Our students will be able to use the restroom without fear of being bullied because bullies will not have private access to other students. Nex Benedict, a non-binary student from Oklahoma died last year after a fight in the restroom. Female bullies followed Nex into the bathroom and beat them up, they later passed away allegedly after completing suicide. Had this bathroom been open concept, with single, private stalls that lock, this attack could have been prevented.

This bill is also another example of state overreach. The state should not have any interest in how a school builds their bathrooms.

I again encourage you to vote **DO NOT PASS** on HB 1144.

Thank you:

Kristin Nelson (she/her)

Attachment: NPR Article Re: Nex Benedict

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NATIONAL

Oklahoma prosecutors will not press charges in Nex Benedict case

UPDATED MARCH 22, 2024 · 10:07 AM ET



Emma Bowman



Tulsa County District Attorney Steve Kunzweiler, pictured in 2018, says his office is not pursuing charges in the Nex Benedict case.

Sue Ogrocki/AP

If you or someone you know may be considering suicide or is in crisis, call or text 988 to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Prosecutors in Oklahoma say they will not pursue charges in the death of Nex Benedict.

Benedict was a 16-year-old nonbinary student whose death last month was ruled a suicide. They had been injured in a fight with high school classmates the day before.

Benedict, who used both he/him and they/them pronouns, had been targeted by bullies in the months leading up to their death because of their gender identity, according to their family.

Sponsor Message

Bullying someone to attempt or complete suicide is a felony in Oklahoma, reported member station KOSU. But Tulsa County District Attorney Steve Kunzweiler says the fight was not one-sided and there's not enough evidence to press charges.

"Based upon the investigation of the Owasso Police Department, I am in the agreement with their assessment that the filing of juvenile charges is not warranted," Kunzweiler said in a press release Thursday. "From all the evidence gathered, this fight was an instance of mutual combat. I do not have a reasonable belief that the State of Oklahoma could sustain its burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt if charges were presented for prosecution."

NATIONAL



What happened to Nex Benedict?

Attorneys for Benedict's family have said injuries Benedict sustained in the fight were significant even if their death was ruled a suicide, KOSU reports.

Sarah Kate Ellis, president of the LGBTQ+ media advocacy group GLAAD, told KOSU on Thursday that Kunzweiler, Owasso police, the school district and the medical examiner's office "have failed Nex Benedict and failed us all."

The school district said it has provided counselors for students and said that, "Any notion that the district has ignored disciplinary action toward those involved is simply untrue." It called Benedict's death devastating. An after hours call to the district was not immediately returned.

Sponsor Message

While in the hospital for the injuries they sustained during the fight, according to body cam footage, Benedict told police that they poured water on a group of girls in the high school bathroom after they picked on them for how they laughed. The group then started beating Benedict to the ground until they "blacked out," they said.

The next day, Benedict was pronounced dead. The medical examiner's office found that they had died after taking a lethal mix of prescription and over-the-

counter medication. The full autopsy report has not yet been publicly released.



People gather outside the Stonewall Inn on Feb. 26 in New York City for a vigil for Nex Benedict, a 16-year-old who identified as nonbinary.

Spencer Platt/Getty Images

Owasso police found brief notes written by Benedict that "appeared to be related to the suicide" and are an important part of their investigation, the district attorney said. The notes, which don't make mention of the fight or difficulties at school, Kunweiler said, are "a personal matter" for Benedict's family.

Benedict's case has sparked demonstrations by LGBTQ+ advocates and calls for bullying law reforms.

Suicide rates among transgender youth are disproportionately high compared to cisgender youth, as NPR previously reported. Trans youth report that the wave of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation around the country is a major contributor to negative impacts on their mental health.

oklahoma non-binary gender nex benedict



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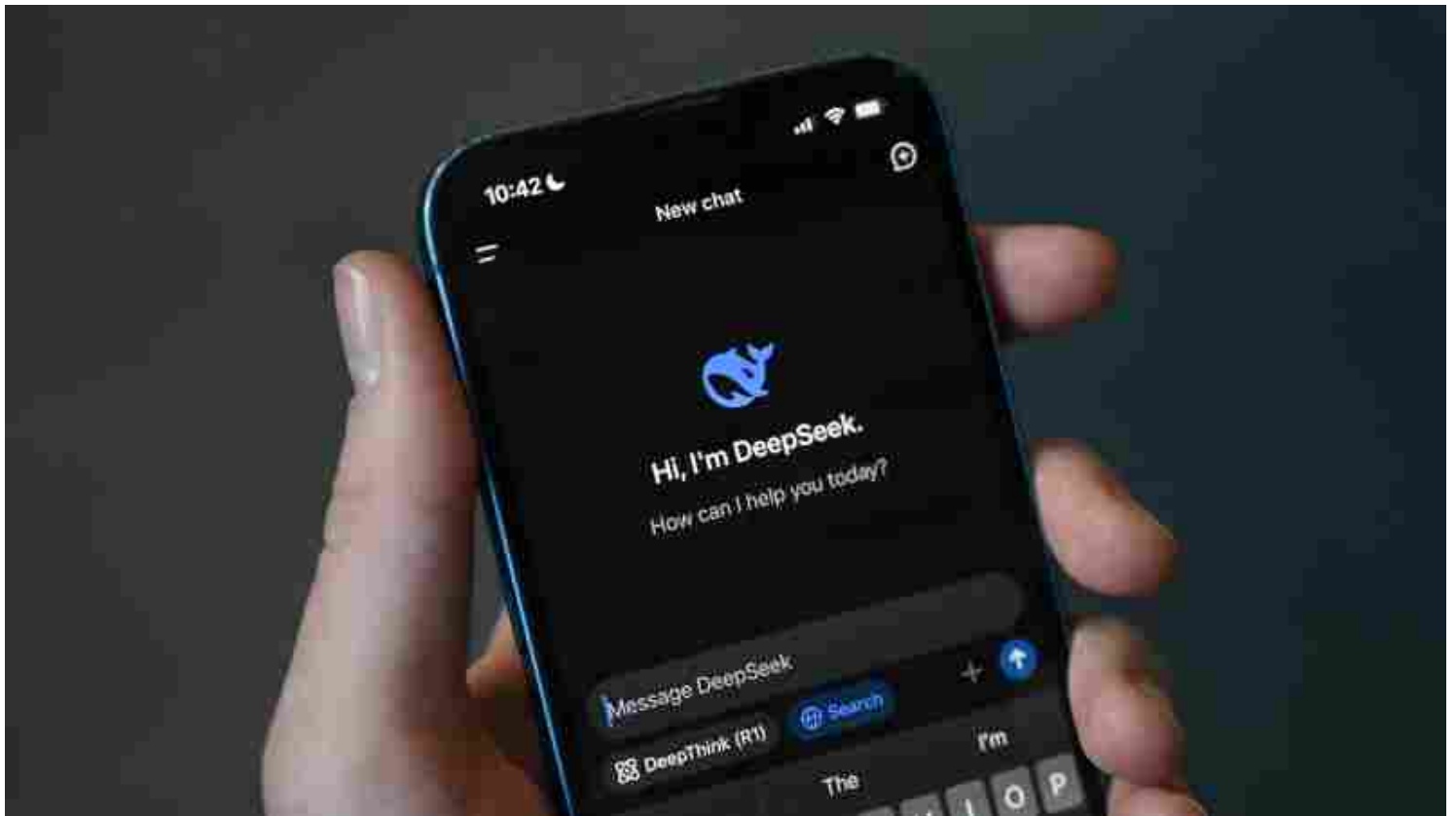
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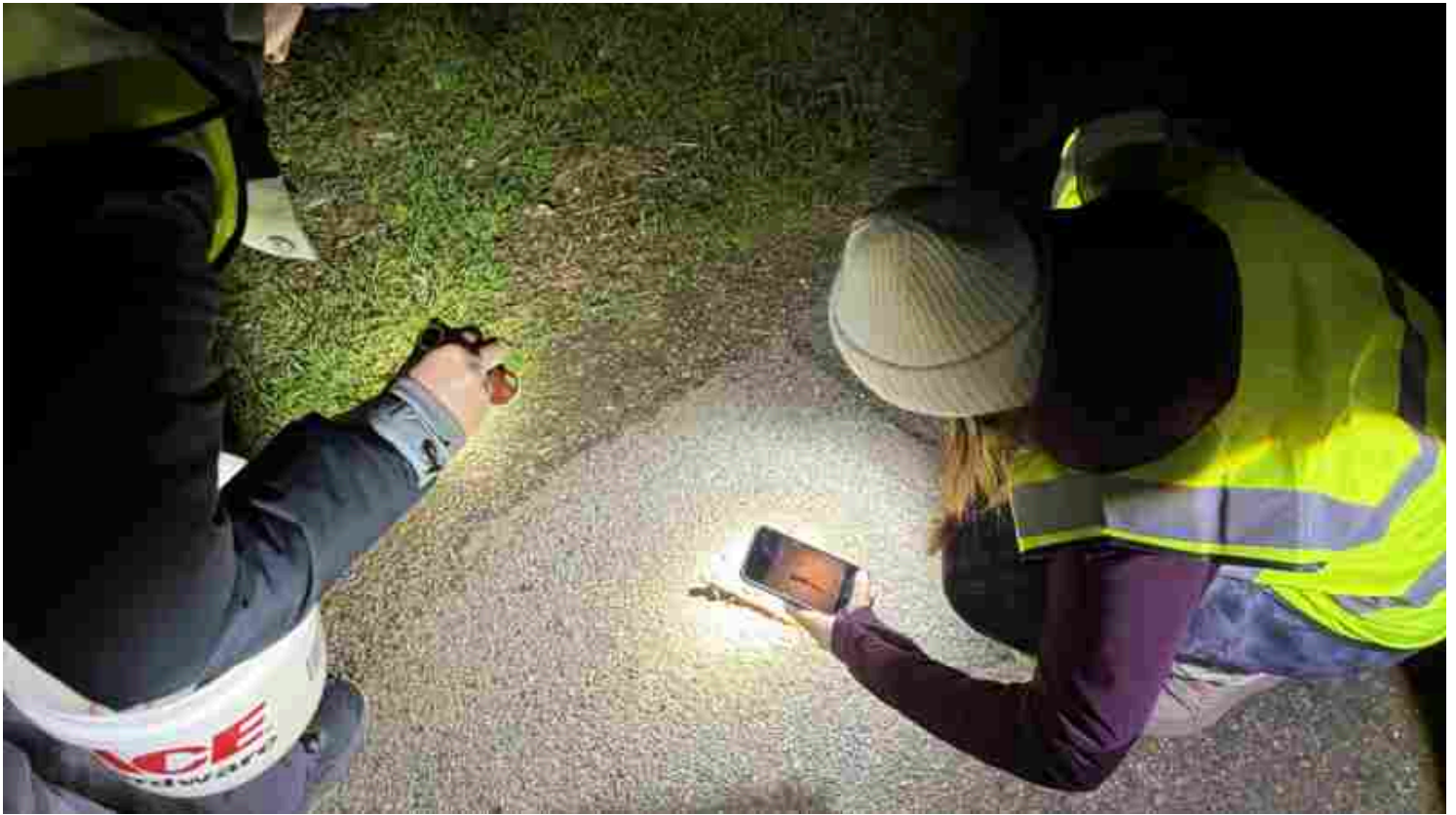
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