

# Jeremy Durham special session signatures grind to halt

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(Photo: Larry McCormack / The Tennessean)

The effort to call a special session centered on considering expelling Rep. [Jeremy Durham \(/search/Jeremy%20Durham/\)](#) has fallen drastically short of the necessary signatures it would take to reconvene the Tennessee General Assembly.

Only 27 lawmakers signed the petition by Friday afternoon, the deadline that was set to collect the 66 signatures it would take to bring lawmakers back to Nashville.

Calls for the special session came after the release of a Tennessee attorney general's report detailing accusations of Durham [engaging in inappropriate sexual encounters with 22 women \(/story/news/politics/2016/07/13/jeremy-durham-investigative-committee-meet-wednesday/87010348/\)](#).

Durham denied sexual contact with anyone while admitting some of the information in the report was true during a news conference where he announced he was suspending his re-election campaign. Although he lost his re-election bid to Sam Whitson in Thursday's primary election, some lawmakers have said a special session is necessary to prevent him from collecting a pension.

On Wednesday, House Majority Leader Gerald McCormick, R-Chattanooga, told The Tennessean that he would consider extending Friday's signature gathering deadline into next week if they were within a "half dozen or so" of the total needed.

"If we're not close I don't think I will," McCormick said. "I've got better things to do than deal with Jeremy Durham."

McCormick previously said that although he would rather expel Durham, he would stand behind whatever decision the body makes.



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[Signatures for Jeremy Durham special session slowly grow](#)

[\(http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/politics/2016/08/02/signatures-jeremy-durham-special-session-slowly-grow/87974524/\)](http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/politics/2016/08/02/signatures-jeremy-durham-special-session-slowly-grow/87974524/)

Jessica Labenberg, advocacy services coordinator for the Sexual Assault Center, said the failure to hold a special session is a "loss of an opportunity for our representatives to really have a voice and set a standard, and say this type of behavior is not going to be tolerated."

She said to change a culture, and to make victims feel comfortable that they will be believed if they come forward, "it takes more than saying here's a number you can call, here's our policy on sex harassment."

Instead of trying to help even one victim, or future victims, regardless of cost or convenience, Labenberg said, lawmakers chose to "be part of the status quo of not giving victims a voice."

Rep. Mike Stewart, D-Nashville, who made the initial call for a special session to prevent Durham from receiving lifetime benefits, said the decision to not hold a Durham-related session reveals a lack of priorities.

"The Republicans could have had a special session to prevent Durham from getting his pension; they chose not to," Stewart said, noting that members in the House GOP fell just short of getting enough support for a special session related to bathrooms.

In May, as many as 57 House lawmakers agreed with calling a special session in response to a federal [transgender bathroom directive \(/story/news/2016/05/13/criticism-praise-for-obama-transgender-order/84321990/\)](#). That effort ultimately subsided when the state's attorney general joined a [multistate lawsuit \(/story/news/politics/2016/05/25/tennessee-among-states-suing-over-obama-transgender-guidance/84919370/\)](#) filed against the Obama administration on the matter.

A second petition calling for a special session to expel Durham and Rep. [Joe Armstrong \(/story/news/2016/07/19/state-rep-armstrong-invoking-marital-privilege-tax-evasion-case/87324656/\)](#), D-Knoxville, had been signed by only 15 lawmakers as of Friday afternoon, said Cade Cothren, a House GOP caucus spokesman.



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Politics drive debate over special 'bathroom' session

(<http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/politics/2016/05/23/politics-play-into-talks-over-special-bathroom-session/84786708/>)

Armstrong is on trial after for reportedly using his office to help pass a law to enrich himself and then not paying the right amount of taxes. Armstrong denies any wrongdoing; a verdict in the ongoing federal trial could come as soon as Monday.

The Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators announced Friday afternoon that they would not be signing the Durham petition, saying the session is not necessary because Republicans knew about his misdeeds for years.

"They stayed silent and took no action for months and months, and now they want to try to turn it into a political issue," said Rep. Brenda Gilmore, chairwoman of the black caucus.

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## **Crisis support line**

The Sexual Assault Center offers a crisis and support line for those in need. The number is 1-800 879-1999

## **Special session signatures**

The following lawmakers (10 Democrats, 15 Republicans) have signed the Durham-only special session petition:

David Alexander, R-Winchester

Bill Beck, D-Nashville

Kevin Brooks, R-Cleveland

Glen Casada, R-Franklin

John Ray Clemmons, D-Nashville

Bill Dunn, R-Knoxville

Marc Gravitt, R-East Ridge

G.A. Hardaway, D-Memphis

Beth Harwell, R-Nashville

Patsy Hazlewood, R-Signal Mountain

Jamie Jenkins, R-Somerville

Darren Jernigan, D-Old Hickory

Sherry Jones, D-Nashville

William Lamberth, R-Cottontown

Susan Lynn, R-Mt. Juliet

Gerald McCormick, R-Chattanooga

Bo Mitchell, D-Nashville

Joe Pitts, D-Clarksville

Jason Powell, D-Nashville

Charles Sargent, R-Franklin

Cameron Sexton, R-Crossville

David Shepard, D-Dickson

Eddie Smith, R-Knoxville

Mike Stewart, D-Nashville

Mark White, R-Memphis

Ryan Williams, R-Cookeville

Jason Zachary, R-Knoxville

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