

December 14, 2022

House Committee on Oversight and Reform
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Maloney and Members of the Committee,

We, the undersigned LGBTQIA+ health care providers, researchers, and organizations, submit the following comments in response to the House Oversight Committee hearing on “The Rise of Anti-LGBTQI+ Extremism and Violence in the United States.” Collectively, we have decades of experience researching best practices and caring for LGBTQIA+ people, particularly transgender people. Our health centers and providers serve thousands of transgender and gender expansive patients across the United States, and our research is cited in top peer-reviewed journals around the globe. Through our education, research, advocacy, and care, we strive to ensure all transgender people have the ability to live long and healthy lives.

In recent months, we have witnessed and experienced the harmful consequences of anti-trans rhetoric on our practice, on our patients, and in our communities. Gender-affirming care – which is medically necessary care for transgender people – is the latest target of politicized attacks on trans people. These attacks are spreading rampant misinformation about what gender-affirming care is and who transgender people are. This rhetoric is actively fueling hate crimes, harassment, and violence against transgender people, their families, and their providers. We are writing to highlight the real-world harms of anti-trans ideology and call on the federal government to protect access to this life-saving care for transgender youth and their families.

Consequences of Anti-Trans Rhetoric on Transgender People

Anti-trans extremists are driving false and dangerous narratives about gender-affirming care, which is stoking fear, division, and violence in our communities. Since the bomb threat targeting Boston Children’s adolescent transgender health program, other gender-affirming care clinics and providers across the country have been targeted, harassed, and threatened with acts of violence.¹ These attacks are shuttering gender-affirming care clinics nationwide and forcing providers to leave their practice. Other transgender health programs are being shut down by politicians, who are wrongfully interfering in private medical decisions that should be made between patients and their physicians.

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics. (2022, October 3). *Leading Health Care Organizations Urge Action to Protect Physicians, Hospitals, Patients and Families from Violence*. <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2022/leading-health-care-organizations-urge-action-to-protect-physicians-hospitals-patients-and-families-from-violence/>

Hostile anti-trans rhetoric has become increasingly pervasive in the public sphere, which is directly impacting the health and well-being of transgender people. Research conducted since the 2016 presidential election have documented transgender people's experiences with personal hate crimes, concerns for their safety, and feelings of depression and anxiety.² Studies have found that transgender people have a higher likelihood of experiencing depression, anxiety, and PTSD when they were concerned about politicians passing anti-trans laws in their state.^{3,4} Additionally, The Trevor Project's 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health survey found that 94% of the almost 35,000 LGBTQ youth surveyed reported that recent politics negatively impacted their mental health. Parents of transgender adolescents also have fears about the consequences of banning gender-affirming care, including losing their child to suicide due to worsening depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.⁵ Parents describe bans on gender-affirming care as a direct attack on their children and as government overreach into medical decisions that should be made between transgender young people, their families, and their doctors.

Studies conducted with providers further highlight the negative impacts of anti-trans legislation on the well-being of transgender adolescents and their ability to receive care. In a study with more than 100 physicians and nurse practitioners from across the country, providers stressed that anti-trans laws negatively impact the mental health of transgender youth.⁶ Anti-trans rhetoric and legislation exacerbate discrimination and societal exclusion for transgender people, contribute to minority stress experienced by trans communities, and widen both physical and mental health disparities.⁷

² Veldhuis, C. B., Drabble, L., Riggle, E. D. B., Wootton, A. R. & Hughes T. L. (2018). "I Fear for My Safety, but Want to Show Bravery for Others": Violence and Discrimination Concerns Among Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Individuals After the 2016 Presidential Election. *Violence and Gender*. 26-36.

<http://doi.org/10.1089/vio.2017.0032>

³ Hughto, J. M. W., Meyers, D. J., Mimiaga, M. J., Reisner, S. L., & Cahill, S. (2021). Uncertainty and Confusion Regarding Transgender Non-discrimination Policies: Implications for the Mental Health of Transgender Adults. *Sexuality and Social Policy*. 19:1069–1079. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-021-00602-w>

⁴ Pacey, M. S., Dikitsas, Z. A., Greenwood, E., McInroy, L. B., Fish, J. N., Williams, N., Riquino, M. R., Lin, M., Henderson, S. B., & Levine, D. S. (2021). The Perceived Health Implications of Policies and Rhetoric Targeting Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth: A Community-Based Qualitative Study. *Transgender Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1089/trgh.2021.0125>

⁵ Kidd, K. M., Sequeira, G. M., Paglisotti, T., Katz-Wise, S. L., Kazmerski, T. M., Hillier, A., Miller, E., & Dowshen, N. (2021). "This Could Mean Death for My Child": Parent Perspectives on Laws Banning Gender-Affirming Care for Transgender Adolescents. *The Journal of Adolescent Health*. 68(6), 1082–1088. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.09.010>

⁶ Hughes, L. D., Kidd, K. M., Gamarel, K. E., Operario, D., & Dowshen, N. (2021). "These Laws Will Be Devastating": Provider Perspectives on Legislation Banning Gender-Affirming Care for Transgender Adolescents. *The Journal of Adolescent Health*, 69(6), 976–982. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.08.020>

⁷ Hatzenbuehler, M. L., & Pachankis, J. E. (2016). Stigma and Minority Stress as Social Determinants of Health Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth: Research Evidence and Clinical Implications. *Pediatric Clinics of North America*, 63(6). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2016.07.003>

The current vitriolic climate is forcing transgender young people and their families to make impossible decisions about the health care they need. Transgender people now face dwindling options when it comes to finding a provider who makes them feel seen, safe, and affirmed in who they are. Those with the economic means will be forced to travel long distances to find gender-affirming providers and pay more for services that are out of network. Other transgender youth will have no choice but to forgo the care they need, which will only worsen their physical and mental health.

Substantial Scientific Evidence Supports Access to Gender-Affirming Care

It is widely documented that transgender people experience poorer health outcomes than the general population due to frequent discrimination, bullying, and harassment. A recent report based on a nationally representative sample highlighted that nearly 40% of transgender respondents had postponed or skipped needed medical care because of disrespect or discrimination from providers.⁸

Gender-affirming care is safe, effective, and necessary for the health and well-being of transgender people. This life-saving care encompasses both social affirmation (e.g., supporting a transgender person's chosen name and pronouns) and medical affirmation, which allows transgender people to live in a body that matches their gender identity. Recent research found that 98% of transgender youth who begin gender-affirming medical treatment in adolescence continue gender-affirming medical care into young adulthood.⁹ This adds to the vast body of scientific evidence demonstrating that gender-affirming care is essential for improving the mental health and overall well-being of transgender people.

For example, research has shown that receipt of gender-affirming care among young people (aged 13 to 20) was associated with 60% lower odds of depression and 73% lower odds of suicidality.¹⁰ Other studies have found similar positive impacts¹¹ on the mental health of transgender and nonbinary youth, including a nearly 40% lower odds of having a suicide attempt

⁸ Medina, C., & Mahowald, L. (2022, September 8). *Advancing Health Care Nondiscrimination Protections for LGBTQI+ Communities*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/advancing-health-care-nondiscrimination-protections-for-lgbtqi-communities/>

⁹ van der Loos, M. A. T. C., Hannema, S. E., Klink, D. T., den Heijer, M., & Wiepjes, C. M. (2022). Continuation of gender-affirming hormones in transgender people starting puberty suppression in adolescence: A cohort study in the Netherlands. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 6(12), 869–875. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642\(22\)00254-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642(22)00254-1)

¹⁰ Tordoff, D. M., Wanta, J. W., Collin, A., Stepney, C. S., Inwards-Breland, D. J., & Ahrens, K. (2022). Mental Health Outcomes in Transgender and Nonbinary Youths Receiving Gender-Affirming Care. *JAMA Network Open*, 5(2). doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.0978

¹¹ Ramos, G. G. F., Mengai, A. C. S., Daltro, C. A. T., Cutrim, P. T., Zlotnik, E., & Beck, A. P. A. (2021). Systematic Review: Puberty suppression with GnRH analogues in adolescents with gender incongruity. *Journal of Endocrinological Investigation*, 44(6):1151-1158. doi: 10.1007/s40618-020-01449-5

in the past year when they have access to gender-affirming hormone therapy.¹² For transgender adults, gender-affirming surgeries were associated with reduced rates of suicide attempts, anxiety, depression, and symptoms of gender dysphoria along with higher levels of life satisfaction, happiness, and quality of life.¹³ While studies in peer-reviewed journals show that transgender adolescents are at increased risk of suicide, depression, and other negative mental health conditions,¹⁴ the scientific evidence indicates that access to gender-affirming medical care can reduce these negative experiences.

Expert Medical Consensus Supports Access to Gender-Affirming Care

The extensive body of evidence-based, peer-reviewed research on gender-affirming care informs current standards of care in the field of transgender medicine. These include clinical care standards developed by the Endocrine Society, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, and the Center of Excellence for Transgender Health at the University of California at San Francisco. Existing standards emphasize a care team of expert medical and mental health professionals to assess and support the individualized needs of their transgender patients.

Furthermore, professional associations across medical and mental health disciplines agree that gender-affirming care is necessary for transgender people to be healthy, safe, and supported in who they are. Every major medical association endorses individualized and age-appropriate access to gender-affirming care. This includes the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, Federation of Pediatric Organizations, and American Psychological Association. These endorsements reflect expert consensus that gender-affirming care is medically necessary and life-saving.

Conclusion

We strongly condemn the extremist anti-trans ideology that is jeopardizing the well-being of our transgender communities. The hateful climate is driving violent attacks on providers, clinics, and transgender people who simply want access to the health care they need. We stand firmly behind the robust evidence base and expert clinical guidelines that demonstrate gender-affirming care is safe, effective, and medically necessary. The federal government must leverage its power to

¹² Green, A. E., DeChants, J. P., Price, M. N., & Davis, C. K. (2021). Association of Gender-Affirming Hormone Therapy With Depression, Thoughts of Suicide, and Attempted Suicide Among Transgender and Nonbinary Youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 70*(4). 643 – 649. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.10.036>

¹³ Swan, J., Phillips, T. M., Sanders, T., Mullens, A. B., Debattista, J. & Bromdal, A. (2022). Mental health and quality of life outcomes of gender-affirming surgery: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*. DOI: 10.1080/19359705.2021.2016537

¹⁴ Connolly, M. D., Zervos, M. J., Barone 2nd, C. J., Johnson, C. C., & Joseph, C. L. M. (2016). The Mental Health of Transgender Youth: Advances in Understanding. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 59*(5):489-495. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.06.012

protect gender-affirming care so that all transgender people can feel supported and at home in who they are. We thank you for the opportunity to comment on this pressing issue.

Respectfully submitted,

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