

## Journalist Resource Series

# Guide for Reporting on Trans Youth and Gender-Affirming Medical Care\*

No matter where we live, our income, the color of our skin, or our genders, we all deserve the ability to feel safe and comfortable in our bodies. But anti-trans lawmakers have turned gender-affirming medical care for youth into a political wedge issue,<sup>[1]</sup> using young people as pawns to galvanize their base and mobilize conservative voters to the polls.<sup>[2]</sup>

We know the number of trans youth who receive gender-affirming medical care still only represents a miniscule fraction of those who need it, and that poor, undocumented, and un- or under-insured trans youth overwhelmingly lack access to this care. We dream of a world where all transgender youth have the freedom to be themselves without worrying about certain politicians stripping away their rights. By uplifting the voices of trans youth and committing to telling truthful, empowering narratives about transgender people, each of us has the power to help bring this vision to fruition within our lifetimes.



Illustration created  
by Zar Sikora

For general inquiries, or to connect with a spokesperson while covering transgender youth and gender-affirming medical care, please contact Sue Yacka-Bible at [sue@transgenderlawcenter.org](mailto:sue@transgenderlawcenter.org).



This guide is intended as a tool for those reporting or speaking about gender-affirming medical care for trans youth and anti-trans medical bans. It outlines the harm these pieces of legislation can, will, and have caused to transgender youth across the country who seek access to gender-affirming medical care, along with their families and medical providers. Please be encouraged to research beyond this guide as you're working to report accurately and sensitively on these topics.

\*While Transgender Law Center and many others use the term "gender-affirming care" to refer to a broad range of life-saving social and medical interventions, several values-aligned organizations have shifted to using the term "life-saving medical care."

## 01

## Talk to Those Most Impacted

### Talk to trans youth themselves

We all deserve to be seen and respected for who we are. However, anti-trans politicians and media personalities continue to peddle mis- and disinformation intended to reinforce harmful narratives about transgender people, particularly Black trans women and femmes.<sup>[3]</sup> Research has found that the most effective inoculation to anti-trans rhetoric is getting to know a transgender person personally.<sup>[4]</sup> While not everyone will have the opportunity to make such meaningful connections, including trans youth of various backgrounds in media provides a clear entrypoint for compassion and understanding between readers and transgender young people.

Medical care bans attack the health, wellness, and medical care of trans youth. Therefore, the voices of trans youth need to be front and center in any media coverage.<sup>[5]</sup> Trans youth are experts in their own lives and experiences and can most speak directly to the impact of these proposed medical care bans.

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Everyone deserves to feel safe and supported while at the doctor's office, especially young people. Banning access to gender-affirming healthcare violates patient-provider relationship boundaries and blocks young people from necessary medical care. Trans and nonbinary youth experience increased risks of harm when they are forced to find care through alternative routes.

— GIA CORDOVA (SHE/HER),  
Co-Executive Director, GSA Network

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## Talk to BIPOC and disabled trans youth

The harm experienced by transgender youth as a result of attacks on gender-affirming medical care varies across the lines of race, disability, and other marginalized identities. In order to accurately convey the myriad ways in which trans youth are impacted, it's critical to include voices of young folks who live at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities—particularly BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and disabled trans youth.

### This includes:

- ☀ Drawing attention to medical racism<sup>[6]</sup> and medical ableism,<sup>[7]</sup> along with health disparities for disabled and BIPOC trans youth, and how these factors compound the impact of anti-trans legislation.
- ☀ Highlighting examples of medical racism and ableism experienced by trans communities, such as:
  - Doctors routinely dismissing ableist medical viewpoints<sup>[8]</sup> as “just common sense,” leading them to provide inadequate and inequitable treatments for trans disabled patients.
  - BIPOC experiencing lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality rates, and increased likelihood of dying in the Emergency Department.
  - How ableism and transphobia work together to medicalize and/or criminalize bodies deemed non-normative, which increases harm, violence, and access barriers for both disabled and non-disabled trans youth.
  - Healthcare professionals routinely underestimating quality of life for disabled people,<sup>[9]</sup> leading them to limit or eliminate treatment options for these patients.
  - Pathologization of BIPOC youth experiencing complications as a result of ableism and anti-Black racism,<sup>[10]</sup> instead of understanding and addressing the impact systemic oppression has on mental and physical health.<sup>[11]\*</sup>
  - Increased incidence of bullying and harassment for disabled trans youth, which directly contributes to increased suicidality rates among disabled LGBTQ youth and young adults.

\*Please note that this is authored by American Academy of Pediatrics, not to be confused with The American College of Pediatricians,<sup>[12]</sup> a deceptively titled organization that promotes an anti-LGBTQ agenda.

## Talk to supportive adults who are also impacted by medical bans

Among the many medical care bans that have been introduced and passed, a growing number threaten adults with criminal penalties for supporting or facilitating transgender young peoples' access to gender-affirming care.<sup>[13]</sup> These bans seek to deter adults from advocating for the safety and well-being of the young people in their lives and punish them for defiance.

Many trans young people are supported by their parents and caregivers in accessing gender-affirming medical care. In order to dispel the perception that the opposite is true, consider always including the voices of impacted adults, such as:

**Parents and guardians  
of trans youth**



**Educators with  
transgender students**



**Doctors and  
healthcare providers**



**Professional  
Medical Association  
representatives\***



\*The arguments bolstering medical care bans blatantly contradict long-standing standards of care for transgender youth established by leading medical authorities, including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics.<sup>[14]</sup>

# 02 Share About Why These Bans are Harmful

Medical care is a fundamental human right that should be afforded to all—regardless of how much money we make, the city we call home, or our genders. But right wing legislators have meticulously engineered a barrage of legislation aimed at stealing this right away from transgender youth. By sharing about why these bans are harmful, you can help create a future where all people have access to the medical care they need to thrive.

Anti-trans medical bans severely limit or completely bar trans youth from legally accessing necessary and life-saving care. Whether or not these bans are passed into law, debates in statehouses and across media are rife with harmful anti-trans mis- and disinformation.

**Anti-trans medical bans severely limit or completely bar trans youth from legally accessing necessary and life-saving care.**

## This has dramatic consequences to the well-being of trans youth, including:

- ☀ Exacerbating mental health concerns among youth,<sup>[15]</sup> as evidenced by the increase in calls to transgender crisis services such as Trans Lifeline<sup>[16]</sup> and The Trevor Project in the wake of past legislation.
- ☀ Tearing families apart,<sup>[17]</sup> either by pursuing criminal action against parents who facilitate access to gender-affirming care or by forcing families to relocate out of state<sup>[18]</sup> in order to pursue adequate healthcare. Poor and low income families are disproportionately impacted by the latter, as they experience greater barriers to relocation.
- ☀ Dehumanizing trans people and attempting to legitimize erroneous medical information about trans youth, which has the potential to deter parents from supporting a young person's medical care.

## 03

# Reframe the Conversation About Gender-Affirming Medical Care

People should always be trusted to know who we are—no matter our age or genders. As anti-trans lawmakers sow seeds of doubt among the public about gender-affirming care for youth, we must recommit ourselves to sharing accurate, affirming information that reinforces trans young peoples' rights to agency and bodily autonomy. By doing so, we help our audiences understand the benefit and necessity of gender-affirming medical care and increase opposition to anti-trans medical care bans.

**Delaying medical transition can cause immense social and emotional harm to transgender youth.**

## What we know:

- ✶ Research by the Mayo Clinic<sup>[19]</sup> has found that most children develop an understanding of their own gender by age 3, whether or not they are transgender.
- ✶ Gender-affirming medical care provided to transgender youth<sup>[20]</sup> looks dramatically different than the intentionally falsified image anti-trans conservatives are painting:
  - For transgender children medically transitioning below the age of adolescence, doctors generally only prescribe a hormone blocker in order to inhibit the onset of puberty.
  - Sex hormones, such as estrogen and testosterone, may be prescribed as a child reaches adolescence—almost always with the required informed consent of their legal guardian.
  - **Gender-affirming surgeries are rarely approved for people under the age of 18.**<sup>[21]</sup>
  - Most bodily changes caused by GAHT (gender-affirming hormone therapy) as prescribed to trans youth are partially if not fully reversible.
- ✶ Delaying medical transition can cause immense social and emotional harm to transgender youth. We know this harm is easily avoidable by allowing youth to access gender-affirming medical care, which trans youth around the globe have been safely doing for years without issue or incident.

# 04 Draw Attention to Anti-LGBTQ Bad Actors Behind the Scenes & Follow the Money

The proliferation of anti-trans medical care bans reflects the meticulously and intentionally orchestrated, long-standing anti-trans campaigns of powerful far-right anti-LGBTQ organizations and coalitions.<sup>[22]</sup> Historically, groups like Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), Family Research Council (FRC), Liberty Council, and the Heritage Foundation have directly or indirectly fueled the introduction of many of these bills.

Parallel to these efforts, an increasing number of local and statewide groups are organizing for the purpose of pushing a transphobic agenda. Various state legislatures contain subgroups or caucuses who are primarily responsible for the creation and proposal of anti-trans legislation, such as North Dakota's Bastiat Caucus. South Dakota State Rep. Fred Deutsch organized by email for years with notable anti-trans voices to craft template messaging and orchestrate a national assault on trans rights.<sup>[23]</sup> ADF plays a key role by drafting template language for bills that advance their anti-LGBTQ agenda,<sup>[24]</sup> then circulating them to far right legislators<sup>[25]</sup> to introduce in their own states.

## Investigate and share about:

- ☀ The anti-trans histories and agendas of far-right anti-LGBTQ organizations and coalitions. Check out Southern Poverty Law Center's Anti-LGBTQ Hate Map<sup>[26]</sup> for information on active hate groups in your state. Avoid linking to these groups' websites in your reporting so as not to increase their reach or ad revenue.
- ☀ The depth of far-right religious organizational involvement in the issue of gender-affirming medical care, such as Heritage Foundation's influential convening of a 2019 panel advocating against affirming the gender identities of transgender youth and the convening of ADF, FRC, and others<sup>[27]</sup> at the 2023 International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit.<sup>[28]</sup>
- ☀ Local and state groups pushing a hateful, anti-trans agenda, including anti-LGBTQ churches, legislative caucuses, committees, and subgroups, and "concerned" parents' groups.<sup>[29]</sup>

## A Wealthy Few Are Controlling Our Democracy

We know that in politics, money is power. By injecting cash into targeted elections<sup>[30]</sup> and funding issue- and candidate-specific lobbying groups,<sup>[31]</sup> a small group of wealthy individuals<sup>[32]</sup> and organizations<sup>[33]</sup> has taken control over our democracy. Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of these donors are aligned with a far-right ideology.

When writing about attacks on trans youth and gender-affirming medical care, research and report on the key players in your area funding far-right anti-trans extremists and policies. Emphasize the need for common sense campaign finance laws<sup>[34]</sup> to ensure all people are given a voice in our democracy, no matter their income level, race, or genders.

### Follow the Money<sup>[35]</sup>

- ☀ Who is funding these groups behind the scenes?
- ☀ How are these groups utilizing their resources to push an agenda?
- ☀ Have they previously/are they currently supporting or endorsing any government officials?
- ☀ What story does this tell?
- ☀ *How can you share this information as a call to action for your readers?*

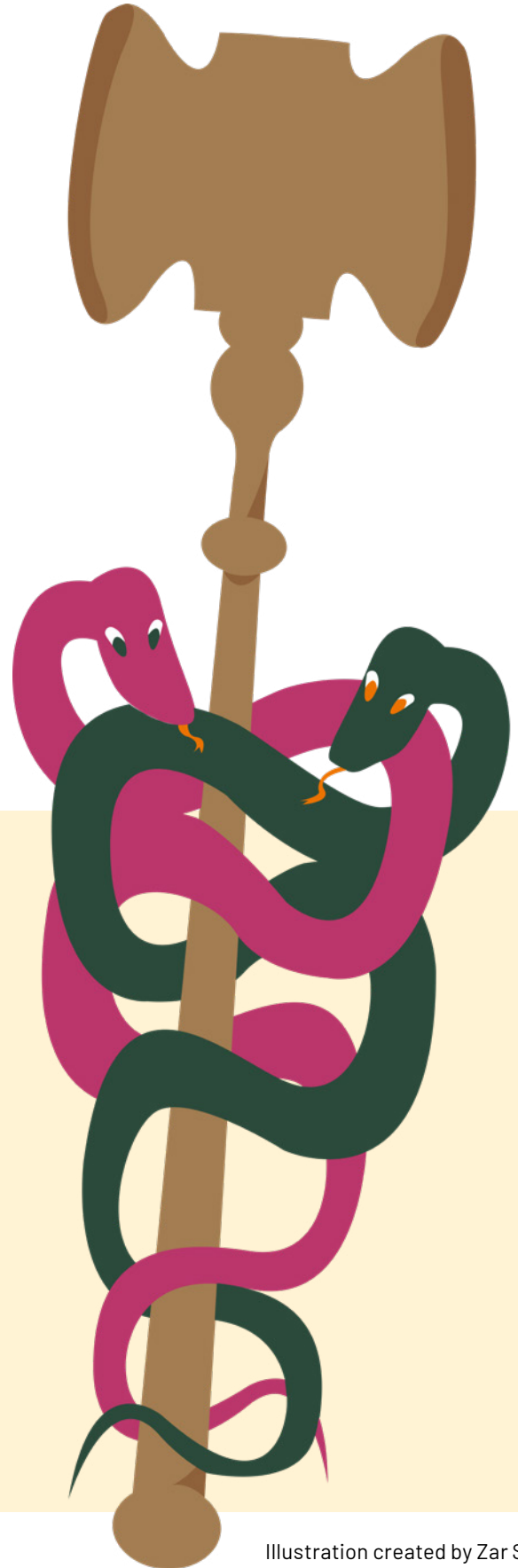


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## 05

# Stay Up To Date on Anti-Trans Legislation

Stay up to date on this year's anti-transgender legislation using [Equality Federation's Anti-Transgender Legislative Tracker](#).<sup>[36]</sup> This tracker focuses on data from the current legislative session and therefore does not contain historical data about anti-trans legislation.

For information about current state policies affecting trans youth, check out [Movement Advancement Project's Equality Maps](#).<sup>[37]</sup>

Include information about how your readers can obtain legal assistance and/or take action against anti-trans legislation in their state, including but not limited to contacting their [local ACLU affiliate](#)<sup>[38]</sup> or [Equality Federation member organization\(s\)](#).<sup>[39]</sup>

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Include state and local trans leadership in your reporting. Your local ACLU affiliate, Equality Federation member organizations(s), and Transgender Law Center may be helpful in connecting you with trans-led organizations.

# Resources

- 1 [In transgender people, GOP candidates find latest 'wedge issue'](#)
- 2 [How a Campaign Against Transgender Rights Mobilized Conservatives - The New York Times](#)
- 3 [Black Trans Women and Black Trans Femmes: Leading & Living Fiercely - Transgender Law Center](#)
- 4 [Messaging Guide: Transgender Youth and the Freedom to Be Ourselves](#)
- 5 ["No Pride Without Trans Youth" Zine | Gender Justice Leadership Programs](#)
- 6 [Health Disparities in Transgender People of Color](#)
- 7 [Right-Wing Attacks on Trans Health Care Rely on Ableist Logic | Truthout](#)
- 8 [Medical Ableism is a Cultural and Institutional Issue, not an Individual Problem - The Black Youth Project](#)
- 9 [Ableism: the undiagnosed malady afflicting medicine - PMC](#)
- 10 [Racism in healthcare: Statistics and examples](#)
- 11 [The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health | Pediatrics](#)
- 12 [Documents Reveal ADF Requested Anti-Trans Research From American College of Pediatricians | Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- 13 [19 states have laws restricting gender-affirming care, some with the possibility of a felony charge | CNN Politics](#)
- 14 [Medical Organization Statements on Transgender Health Care - Trans Health Project](#)
- 15 [The Trevor Project: 2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People](#)
- 16 [Transgender Hotline Reports Flood of Calls After Trump Walks Back Federal Protections](#)
- 17 [Transgender Texas kids are terrified after governor orders that parents be investigated for child abuse](#)
- 18 [Trans kids and their families are leaving Texas amid state efforts to charge parents with child abuse - Houston Public Media](#)
- 19 [Children and gender identity: Supporting your child - Mayo Clinic](#)

# Resources

- 20 [What is gender-affirming medical care for transgender children? Here's what you need to know.](#)
- 21 [Standards of Care - WPATH World Professional Association for Transgender Health](#)
- 22 [The Anti-Trans Hate Machine: A Plot Against Equality: It's Not Really About Sports on Apple Podcasts](#)
- 23 [Inside the Secret Working Group That Helped Push Anti-Trans Laws Across the Country – Mother Jones](#)
- 24 [A Hate Group Is Reportedly Behind 2021's Dangerous Wave of Anti-Trans Bills | Them](#)
- 25 [The Anti-Trans Hate Machine: A Plot Against Equality: Transphobia In A Suit on Apple Podcasts](#)
- 26 [Hate Map | Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- 27 [Anti-LGBTQ+ groups have ties to International Religious Freedom Summit | Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- 28 [IRF Summit: Anti-LGBTQ Rhetoric on Display, McGovern Calls Out Hate | Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- 29 [How Moms for Liberty is helping states pass vicious anti-LGBTQ bills | Media Matters for America](#)
- 30 [How the Koch brothers used their massive fortune to power a conservative crusade that reshaped American politics](#)
- 31 [Meet the 'Feminists' Doing the Koch Brothers' Dirty Work | The Nation](#)
- 32 [The Increasing Influence of Billionaires on US Politics: America's Hidden Oligarchy – MIR](#)
- 33 [Follow the Money Behind Anti-Abortion Laws | Brennan Center for Justice](#)
- 34 [Limits on the Influence of Money in Politics - Common Cause](#)
- 35 [Dark Money "Women's Groups" Are Using Anti-Trans Scaremongering to Oppose ERA | Truthout](#)
- 36 [Equality Federation's Anti-Transgender Legislative Tracker](#)
- 37 [Movement Advancement Project's Equality Maps](#)
- 38 [Affiliates | American Civil Liberties Union](#)
- 39 [Equality Federation member organization\(s\)](#)

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