

## Journalist Resource Series

# Guide for Reporting on Anti-Trans Athletics Bans

In recent years, US state legislators have increasingly targeted transgender youth using legislation intended to bar them from competing on school sports teams in alignment with their gender identity, which we believe can and will have consequences into adulthood. Below is a guide for journalists across the country who are covering this legislation, and best practices for centering those most impacted by anti-trans athletics bans – transgender youth.

To connect with a spokesperson while covering anti-trans athletics bans, please contact K Richardson at [k@transgenderlawcenter.org](mailto:k@transgenderlawcenter.org).

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## Tips for Reporting on Anti-Trans Youth Athletics Bans

This guide is intended to be a tool for those reporting on anti-trans athletics bans and the harm these pieces of legislation can and will cause to transgender youth across the country who seek to participate in K-12 athletics. Please be encouraged to research beyond this guide as you're working to report accurately and sensitively about these bans.

# 01

## TALK TO THOSE MOST IMPACTED

### Talk to trans youth themselves

These bans are about trans students participating in school athletics and therefore, the voices of trans youth need to be front and center in any media coverage. Trans youth are experts in their own lives and experiences and can most directly speak to the impact of this legislation. Consider always including trans youth voices, particularly those of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) and disabled trans youth, which are routinely ignored.

For more on transgender youth athletes, check out the documentary *Changing the Game*, now [streaming on Hulu](#).



Bills that try to ban trans youth from playing sports continue harmful practices of using legislation to target vulnerable communities and to use policy in order to police the bodies of athletes from marginalized communities; trans youth exist at the intersection of these realities. All students have the right to bring their full selves to school and the right to have their most authentic selves respected.



– **Gia Cordova, Associate Director, Gender Justice Leadership Programs**  
(pronouns: she/her)

## Talk to BIPOC and disabled trans youth

Athletics has a lengthy and enduring history of racist and ableist discrimination, and youth sports are no exception. These compound the impact of anti-trans athletics bans on BIPOC and disabled trans youth.

Economic disparity between BIPOC families and white families is a key driving factor of racial disparity in youth sports. For more on this topic, check out [Racial inequality in youth sports: Understanding the barriers presented to Black athletes](#).

Disabled youth have historically faced significant access barriers to sports; dishearteningly, the COVID-19 pandemic has widened the access gap between disabled students and their non-disabled counterparts. For more on this topic, check out [Barriers to Participation of Children with Disabilities in Youth Sports](#).

Due to the lack of BIPOC and disability representation in professional athletics, BIPOC and disabled youth have often lacked access to sports and athletic teams and are often intentionally excluded from active participation.

There are notable differences in the ways the media discusses Black and Brown athletes, particularly Black and Brown women, when compared to other athletes.

Black women and girls are more likely to be subjected to so-called “sex verification” testing in order to compete. Prominent athletes, including [Serena Williams](#) and [Caster Semenya](#), have been targeted by demoralizing testing procedures ahead of their participation in the Olympics, which has historically excluded Black women through invasive testing, strict rule changes and unnecessary drug tests.

Black and Brown trans students have historically been targeted by discriminatory legal battles, and anti-Black racism, [misogynoir](#), and [transmisogynoir](#) more specifically are often the catalysts for hateful legislation.

Notably, Alliance Defending Freedom’s case *Soule v. Connecticut* specifically targets two Black transgender women who competed on their high school track team.

## **On the subject of bodies, all questions are off-limits**

Many trans student athlete bans are filled with graphic and erroneous medical information. Remember that it is never appropriate to ask trans youth about their bodies, hormones, or medical care. Instead, you can:

**Set clear boundaries for questions about what is or is not relevant to sports**

**Ask youth about their experiences participating in sports and on teams**

**Ask about the social and emotional impacts of anti-trans athletics bans**

## **Talk to supportive adults who are showing up for trans youth**

The voices of supportive adults must be included as a part of the media narrative to help correct the erroneous perception that all adults in positions of power are in favor of these harmful bans. Trans youth in states where these bans are introduced deserve to know that they have supportive adults in their corner.

This can include:

**Parents and guardians of trans youth**

**Teachers and school administrators**

**Coaches and State Athletics Association<sup>1</sup> representatives**



## **SHARE ABOUT WHY THESE BANS ARE HARMFUL**

### **Have a negative social and emotional impact on trans and nonbinary youth by:**

#### **Forcing them to choose between invalidation or exclusion**

Anti-trans athletics bans put transgender youth in an impossible position: having to choose between competing on a team that does not align with their gender identity, or forgoing participation in sports altogether.

#### **Ostracizing trans youth from their peers**

Sports give young people the opportunity to spend time with one another while engaged in a fun activity, thus facilitating connection and meaningful relationships. By excluding trans youth from sports, anti-trans athletics bans also effectively ostracize trans youth from critical social opportunities.

#### **Making them the subject of public scrutiny**

Transgender youth often feel put under a microscope and forced to justify their right to participate in sports not just to lawmakers, but to their communities as well. Anti-trans athletics bans frequently target transgender girls, and particularly Black trans girls, who experience the brunt of this scrutiny.

<sup>1</sup>16 states and Washington D.C. currently have laws in place allowing transgender high school athletes to compete in school sports without restrictions, and many of these states have had these policies in place for years without issue or incident. Check out TransAthlete's [K-12 map](#) for up-to-date information on policies by state.

# 03

## REFRAME MISINFORMED NARRATIVES ABOUT TRANS ATHLETES

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**Trans athletes succeed for the very same reason as cis athletes—dedication and hard work.**

Trans women and girls face widespread discrimination and violence in daily life and this translates into their athletic areas as well. Just like their cisgender counterparts, trans youth want to play the sport that they enjoy and are drawn to. Creating the narrative that transfeminine athletes are stronger than cis women athletes pushes false information and ignores the standards that are set for athletes across the board. Journalists should also resist the narrative that HRT is likened to steroid usage or increased strength. Transgender athletes' abilities, like cis athletes', vary based on experience, training, and resources.

## 04 DRAW ATTENTION TO ANTI-LGBTQ GROUPS AND ORGS BEHIND THE SCENES

The proliferation of anti-trans student athlete bans is not homegrown hatred, and instead reflects the influence of powerful far-right anti-LGBTQ organizations and coalitions. Historically, groups like the 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 bans.

There are also a number of local or statewide groups organizing for the purpose of pushing a transphobic agenda. A number of state legislatures contain subgroups or caucuses who are primarily responsible for the creation and proposal of anti-trans legislation. Notably, ADF played a key role in drafting the language for ID HB 500, which has become a framework for anti-trans athletics bans nationwide. For more on this, check out TransLash podcast's It's Not Really About Sports and their multi-part series The Anti-Trans Hate Machine: A Plot Against Equality, wherever you get your podcasts.



## ACTION ITEMS | 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](#) 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 trans athletics, for example, ADF's "Fair Fight" focus and recent lawsuits, including [Soule v. Connecticut](#) and [Hecox v. Little](#).

The long-standing campaign of far-right legal attacks on LGBTQ people in the U.S., as recently evidenced by ADF's suit in [Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission](#) and [Ingersoll & Freed v. Arlene's Flowers, Inc.](#), but going back more than a decade.

Local and state groups who are pushing a hateful, anti-trans agenda including anti-LGBTQ churches, legislative caucuses, committees, and subgroups, and "concerned" parents' groups.

### **THE MONEY TRAIL:**

- 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?



# 05

## **STAY UP TO DATE ON ANTI-TRANS LEGISLATION**

Stay up to date on this year's anti-transgender legislation using the [Freedom for All Americans | Legislative Tracker](#). 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](#).

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](#) or [Equality Federation member](#).

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



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