

# TIP SHEET FOR JOURNALISTS COVERING TRANS STUDENT ATHLETE BILLS

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*In 2020, over a dozen states are considering legislation that would restrict transgender students' right to participate on their high school sports teams. Below is a guide for journalists across the country who are covering this legislation, and best practices for centering those most impacted by these bills – transgender youth.*

## **Talk to those most impacted – trans youth themselves**

These bills are about trans students participating in high 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.

“As a student athlete, and like my teammates, sports were my world. Playing softball let me challenge myself to become stronger, encouraged me to take risks and mostly let me have fun and enjoy high school with my friends. Anti-trans student athlete bills make it clear that people refuse to let me live safely and block athletes like me from competing based on fallacies and misrepresented statistics. All student athletes deserve to play the sport they love and trans young people need journalists to humanize our stories, listen to what we have to say, and respect our journeys as we simply try to exist.”

- Gia Cordova, TRUTH Program Senior Organizer (Pronouns: She/Her)

## **When you talk to trans youth, be respectful and stick to sports**

Many trans student athlete bills are filled with graphic and erroneous medical information. Remember that 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 trans athletics bills

To connect with a spokesperson while covering trans student athlete bills, please contact Sue Yacka-Bible at [sue@transgenderlawcenter.org](mailto:sue@transgenderlawcenter.org).

## **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 grown-ups in positions of power are in favor of these harmful bills. Trans youth in states where these bills 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\* representatives

*\*There are 17 states that already allow transgender high school athletes to compete in school sports without restrictions, and many of those states have had those policies in place for years without issue or incident.*



## Draw attention to the anti-LGBTQ organizations behind the curtain

The proliferation of trans student athlete bills are not homegrown, and instead reflect the influence of powerful far-right anti-LGBTQ organizations like the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), Family Resource Council (FRC) and Liberty Council who are pushing many of these bills. It is incumbent upon journalists to investigate and make clear:

- The anti-trans histories and agendas of organizations like ADF, FRC, and the Liberty Council
- The depth of far-right religious organizational involvement in the issue of trans athletics, for example, ADF's "Fair Fight" focus and recent lawsuits
- The long-standing campaign of far-right legal attacks on LGBTQ people in the U.S., most recently evidenced by ADF's suit in *Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, but going back more than a decade

## We are not all Olympians (or even State Champions)

Trans youth, like most of us, simply want to play sports in order to access the rewards of good health, camaraderie, and fun that participation in athletics provides. Journalists should resist the narrative that these trans student athlete bills are a race to the State Championships and focus instead on what day-to-day participation on teams looks like. This can include:

- Talking to trans students who participate on teams about what it means to them
- Talking to teammates who are welcoming of trans students participating on teams
- Talking to coaches who are welcoming of trans students participating on teams

For more information on best practices for covering trans student athlete bills, please contact Sue Yacka-Bible at [sue@transgenderlawcenter.org](mailto:sue@transgenderlawcenter.org).

### About Transgender Law Center

Transgender Law Center (TLC) is the largest national trans-led organization advocating for a world in which all people are free to define themselves and their futures. Grounded in legal expertise and committed to racial justice, TLC employs a variety of community-driven strategies to keep transgender and gender nonconforming people alive, thriving, and fighting for liberation.

