

Journalist Resource Series

Guide for Reporting on Anti-Trans Medical Bans



In recent years, US state legislators have increasingly targeted trans youth with legislation intended to severely restrict or bar their access to gender-affirming medical care. Many of these bills seek to criminalize parents, caregivers, guardians, or healthcare professionals who support or facilitate their access to affirming care. 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 medical bans – transgender youth.

To connect with a spokesperson while covering anti-transgender medical bans, please contact K Richardson at k@transgenderlawcenter.org.

For general inquiries, please contact Arielle Rebekah at arielle@transgenderlawcenter.org.

Tips for Reporting on Anti-Transgender Medical Bans

This guide is intended to be a tool for those reporting on anti-trans medical bans. It outlines the harm these pieces of legislation can and will cause 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 about these bans.

01

TALK TO THOSE MOST IMPACTED

Talk to trans youth themselves

Medical care bans attack the health, wellness, and medical care of trans youth, 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 these proposed medical care bans.

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

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 thoughts from trans youth, read GJLP's zine [No Pride Without Trans Youth: What we \(trans youth\) saw, felt + learned this Spring 2021 legislative session.](#)

Talk to BIPOC and disabled trans youth

Also make note of both racism and ableism in medicine, along with health disparities for disabled and BIPOC trans youth, and how these factors compound the impact of anti-trans legislation on BIPOC and disabled trans youth.

BIPOC experience lower life expectancy, high infant mortality rates, and are more likely to die in the Emergency Department.

Disabled LGBTQ youth report higher instances of harassment and are more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled peers, having a direct impact on the suicidality rates of disabled LGBTQ youth and young adults.

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.

Doctors frequently [dismiss ableist medical viewpoints](#) as "just common sense," which leads them to provide inadequate and inequitable treatments for disabled patients.

[Studies show](#) that healthcare professionals routinely underestimate the quality of life for disabled people, which often leads them to limit or eliminate treatment options for these patients.

Ableism and [anti-Black racism](#) lead the medical field to pathologize BIPOC youth, overlooking the [impact](#)¹ that systemic oppression has on mental and physical health.



At the root of anti-trans medical bans, specifically for trans youth, is a culture of transphobia, actively engaging in the erasure of trans identity. We must affirm and normalize access to gender affirming care for trans youth. It is a fact that greater levels of support and acceptance dramatically lower the likelihood trans youth will engage in self-harm or suicide. The first step to that is access to gender affirming care.



– **Faith Phillips, a trans adult and advocate previously denied access to gender-affirming care. Owner of Wish Me Luck Tattoo (pronouns: she/her)**

Talk to supportive adults who are also impacted by medical bans

Many of the medical care bans that have been introduced would severely criminalize adults, including parents, doctors, and healthcare providers who are supportive and affirming of 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 bans. These bans seek to criminalize adults who are simply advocating for the well-being of transgender young people. Consider always including the voices of impacted adults, such as: **parents and guardians of trans youth, doctors and healthcare providers, and Professional Medical Association representatives**².



SHARE ABOUT WHY THESE BANS ARE HARMFUL

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

The filing and passage of anti-trans bills has historically exacerbated mental health concerns among youth, as evidenced by the increase in calls to transgender crisis services (such as [Trans Lifeline](#) and [The Trevor Project](#)) in the wake of past legislation.

Anti-trans medical bans also have the power to tear families apart, either by pursuing criminal action against parents who facilitate access to gender-affirming care or by forcing families to relocate out of state in order to pursue adequate healthcare. Poor and low income families are disproportionately impacted by the latter, as they experience greater barriers to relocation.

Lawmakers perpetuate the erroneous notion that gender-affirming medical care is potentially harmful, which both dehumanizes trans people and may deter parents from supporting a young person's medical care.

¹Please note: This is authored by American Academy of Pediatrics, which is completely independent from The American College of Pediatricians—a “deceptively titled organization that actually promotes an anti-LGBTQ agenda.” For more on this, read Freedom for All Americans’ [Truth Alert](#).

²Medical care bans would criminalize best practice medical care for transgender youth that is backed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, and other leading medical authorities.

03

REFRAME MISINFORMED NARRATIVES ABOUT GENDER-AFFIRMING MEDICAL CARE

Transgender youth can and should be trusted to know who they are.

Research by the Mayo Clinic has found that most children develop an understanding of their own gender by age 3, whether they are transgender or cisgender. It is important to understand what gender-affirming medical care looks like for transgender youth.

For transgender children medically transitioning below the age of adolescence, doctors generally stick to prescribing a hormone blocker in order to inhibit the onset of puberty. Sex hormones, such as estrogen and testosterone, may be prescribed as the child reaches adolescence.

Gender-affirming surgeries are rarely approved for people under the age of 18.

Most bodily changes caused by GAHT (gender-affirming hormone therapy) as prescribed to trans youth are partially, if not fully reversible.

Journalists should resist the narrative that anti-trans medical bans are about giving trans youth time to decide what they want, and instead focus on the immense social and emotional harm that delaying transition can cause.

04

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

The proliferation of anti-trans medical care 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 bills.

There are also a number of local and statewide groups organizing for the purpose of pushing a transphobic agenda. A number of state legislatures contain subgroups or caucuses who are largely responsible for the creation and proposal of anti-trans legislation (such as North Dakota's Bastiat Caucus). 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 the danger of anti-trans medical bans, check out TransLash podcast's Transphobia in a Suit 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 medical care bans, for example, the Heritage Foundation's influential convening of a 2019 panel advocating against affirming the gender identities of transgender youth.

Local and state groups 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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