



POLICY AGENDA

KEEP LGBTQI+ YOUTH SAFE

The millions of LGBTQI+ young people growing up in the United States need the same things as their straight, cisgender peers: safe and supportive homes, equal access to educational opportunities, welcoming communities, and affirming and inclusive health care. When LGBTQI+ people are treated with equal dignity and respect and given the support they need to be their most authentic selves, we build a healthier and happier society for all.

Unfortunately, some state politicians are doubling down on bigoted policies designed to harm LGBTQI+ people, especially trans, nonbinary, and intersex youth. These politicians claim concern for the health and safety of youth to justify these policies. In reality, these policies stoke fear and hatred against LGBTQI+ youth, in addition to endangering all young people by reinforcing dangerous sex stereotypes and promoting scrutiny of and discrimination against anyone who deviates from them.

Our communities want to see LGBTQI+ youth supported—not attacked. [Polling](#) shows that the majority of people (76%) support measures to protect LGBTQI+ people from discrimination. LGBTQI+ youth need policymakers to show up for them by enacting policies that support their health, success, and safety.

LGBTQI+ YOUTH NEED SUPPORTIVE POLICIES TO GROW AND LEARN IN SAFETY.

LGBTQI+ youth face discrimination in a range of areas—and these disparities are exacerbated for young people who face additional discrimination on the basis of other identities, including race, class, gender, and disability. Discrimination too often prevents LGBTQI+ young people from fully participating in school, despite Title IX's requirement that no student be denied opportunities or otherwise discriminated against based on sex, including sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status. [One report](#) that surveyed K-12 LGBTQ+ students showed that LGBTQ+ students cited anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination, including harassment and anti-LGBTQI+ school policies, as the main barrier to their success at school: those who experienced discrimination were more than twice as likely to miss school, reported lower GPAs, and were less likely to have plans to finish high school.

Additionally, discrimination in health care and insurance coverage and new state laws criminalizing care for trans youth or creating administrative barriers to this life-saving care prevent LGBTQI+ young people—especially transgender youth, LGBTQI+ youth of color, and LGBTQI+ disabled youth—from getting care that meets their needs and endangers their families and providers. This discrimination [worsens existing health disparities](#).

However, inclusive policies can counteract these negative outcomes and ensure LGBTQI+ youth are given the same support they need as their cis and straight peers. For example, the Trevor Project [found](#) that LGBTQI+ youth who simply learned about LGBTQI+ issues or people in school had 23% lower odds of reporting a suicide attempt over a 12-month span compared to their peers who did not learn about LGBTQI+ issues or people.

POLICIES THAT WILL WORK TOGETHER TO KEEP LGBTQI+ YOUTH SAFE AND HEALTHY INCLUDE:

Ensuring Affirming and Accurate Curricula. All students deserve to feel safe and included at school, which means ensuring they can see themselves reflected in what they read and learn. However, the [recent wave of action](#) at the school district and state level to censor any discussion of LGBTQI+ identities, relationships, or people in what students read and learn has hindered school staff and educators' ability to create safe learning environments for LGBTQI+ youth. These policies intimidate school staff into self-censoring what they teach—which often means avoiding teaching accurate history that includes LGBTQI+ historical figures, assigning any books that include positive representation of LGBTQI+ people, and including LGBTQI+ relationships and health topics in developmentally-appropriate sex education. They also discourage school staff from addressing anti-LGBTQI+ bullying and normalize the stigma surrounding LGBTQI+ students, increasing the horrific rates of bullying, harassment, and violence they already face. But including representation of LGBTQI+ people and teaching about LGBTQI+ history and health in developmentally appropriate ways counteracts the stigma LGBTQI+ students face, which means they are [likely to feel safe and included](#) at school and less likely to risk sexual assault, harassment, and bullying. **State policymakers can support these efforts** by advancing policies that require access to inclusive and developmentally appropriate books and a school district from [bringing challenges to books and curricula](#), and decisions about cultivating a catalogue of inclusive and diverse books and learning materials be made by educators, school librarians, and other trained educational professionals—and not driven by extremists' discriminatory agendas.

Addressing Harassment and Violence Against LGBTQI+ Youth in Schools. Students perceived as LGBTQI+ [face pervasive](#) sex-based harassment, including sexual assault, from kindergarten through the university level. Certain members of the LGBTQI+ community are especially at risk, including [bisexual and pansexual students](#), who are at an increased risk of sexual harassment, and [transgender students](#), who are

at an increased risk of sexual assault. LGBTQI+ folks who occupy multiple identities, like [trans students of color](#), are at an even greater risk of sexual assault at school than white trans students. **State policymakers must ensure** schools are providing protections for students consistent with what federal civil rights laws like Title IX require. This includes ensuring schools promptly and effectively respond to reports of sex-based harassment, offer material support to every student who reports sex-based harassment, train staff on recognizing and reporting harassment, and prohibit disciplining students for reporting (e.g., punishing a student for breaking a school rule at the time they were victimized). **States should go further** by passing a [state SAFER Act](#) to address gaps in Title IX and other federal civil rights laws and strengthen protections under those laws.

States must also ensure [robust protections](#) against bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, sex characteristics, and sex stereotypes to address the rampant harassment LGBTQI+ students face. Consistent with Title IX's requirements, states should require school superintendents to publish and update model policies to address bullying, harassment, and sexual violence with examples, detailed complaint procedures, and protections against retaliation or punishment of students who complain to school staff. Finally, because school authorities (such as superintendents, principals, and school board members) wield significant power over the lives of young people, they should receive consistent training on recognizing and reporting bullying and harassment, as well as on how to be supportive and respectful of LGBTQI+ students' identities.

Protect the Rights of Transgender, Nonbinary, and Intersex Students to Access Sex-Separated Spaces Consistent With Their Affirmed Gender.

Bans on the rights of trans, nonbinary, and intersex youth to access school spaces like bathrooms, locker rooms, and sports teams are growing. These bans are illegal and make school unsafe for trans, nonbinary, and intersex students by reinforcing stigma and normalizing mistreatment of them. A national survey of LGBTQI+ students showed that trans students were more likely than lesbian, gay, and bisexual students to [report avoiding sex-separated spaces](#) like bathrooms or locker rooms for fear of harassment or assault. A Harvard Public Health study found that trans and nonbinary students forced to use bathrooms or locker rooms that did not match their affirmed gender [were more likely to be sexually assaulted](#). These bans make school less safe for all students by encouraging schools to police any students that do not conform to gender stereotypes, including cisgender girls. Bathroom bans have led to cis women [being harassed](#) and accused of being trans in women's bathrooms simply because they had short hair; sports bans have resulted in cis high school girls being [secretly investigated](#) by their schools and

publicly accused of being transgender on the belief that they were “too successful” in their sport to “truly” be girls. Another alarming form of body-policing included in some sports bans is “sex testing,” which requires students to “prove” their sex in order to play by forcing them to produce medical records of their reproductive information, undergo chromosomal testing, or even submit to genitals exams. This results in unnecessary trauma for students as young as age 5, especially transgender girls, intersex girls, nonbinary students, and cisgender girls who do not conform to stereotypical notions of femininity. **States can make schools safer** for all students by implementing policies that ensure students can access sex-separated spaces, including bathrooms, locker rooms, and sports, consistent with their affirmed gender. Sports policies should not base eligibility to play on physical exams or medical requirements, but on verbal or written attestation of a student’s gender identity from the student, parent or guardian, or community member. For more guidance on inclusive sports policies, states can look to trans-inclusive participation policies maintained [by more than a dozen state sport associations](#) and the research showing that states with trans-inclusive sports policies saw participation [by all women and girls](#), whereas states with trans-exclusive policies saw a decrease in participation.

Preventing Medical Mistreatment of Youth.

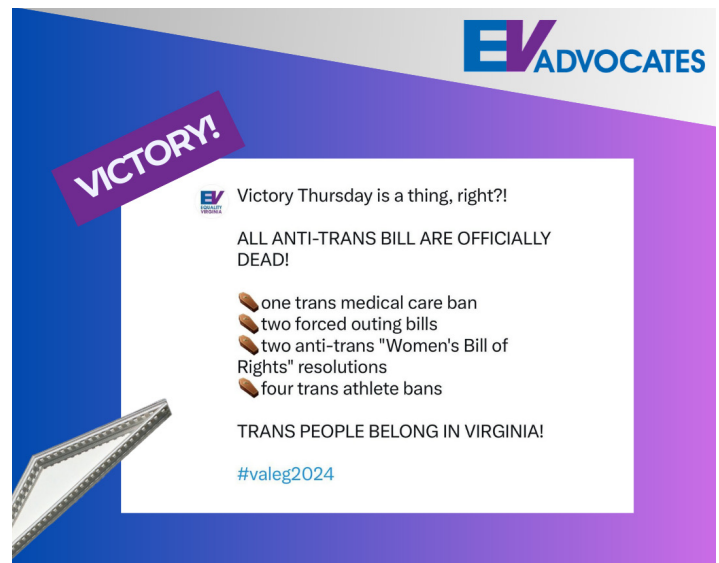
When intersex children are born with variations in their genitals or reproductive anatomy that are not perceived as fitting binary categories of “male” or “female,” they are often subjected to non-consensual surgeries based on preconceptions of what a “normal body” looks like. These children are typically too young to consent to the procedures, which often result in lifelong trauma and harm. Similarly, “conversion therapy” is an [abusive and discredited practice](#) that purports to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender and can cause grave, lifelong harms to survivors. It has already been banned in [more than 20 states and more than 115 municipalities](#). **States can take two important steps** to protect youth from outdated and dangerous pseudoscientific practices: prohibit nonconsensual surgeries on infants and young children with intersex traits, and ban “conversion therapy.”

Ensuring Access to Gender-Affirming Care.

For many transgender youth, gender-affirming care—individualized, essential health care that supports them in living consistent with their gender identity—is life-saving. But many state governments have banned this vital care for young people or made it much harder to access. These baseless attacks on trans youth must be reversed and stopped from continuing in the future. An additional problem is the lack of comprehensive coverage of gender-affirming care in private insurance and Medicaid: While [many states](#) have explicitly clarified that gender-affirming care must be covered, some

of those policies include discriminatory, medically unsupported restrictions for youth. Many other states lack explicit policies on insurance coverage, leaving trans youth with uncertain or incomplete coverage, while yet other states illegally exclude coverage of gender-affirming care from their state Medicaid programs. **States should ensure** that private insurance and Medicaid programs in their state cover the full range of gender-affirming care. Additionally, states should clearly prohibit discrimination and harassment in health care settings.

Sheltering Families Forced to Move by Anti-Trans Policies. Many families face an uncertain future where they may have to leave their homes and relocate to a state where their trans, nonbinary, or intersex child can safely access necessities, including a safe and inclusive school environment and appropriate medical care. LGBTQI+ families forced to move face many barriers to establishing residence for purposes of benefits eligibility and continuation of health care that states should address proactively. **States can support** LGBTQI+ families forced to relocate by providing holistic resources on housing, as well as job training and placement resources; subsidizing community cultural competence training for health care providers; and creating centralized hotlines to orient new resident families to low-cost resources for trans and nonbinary youth.



Graphic from Equality Virginia celebrating defeat of four bills designed to harm LGBTQI+ youth. Equality Virginia worked tirelessly with grassroots organizers and LGBTQI+ families, coordinating a strong presence in their state legislative session and countering a well-funded extremist movement trying to impose gender policing. They succeeded in joining advocates in Georgia and Kentucky who defeated every single legislative attack on LGBTQI+ communities in 2024.