

TALKING ABOUT



Transgender Youth Health Care



INTRODUCTION

Anti-LGBTQ politicians are introducing laws in an effort to make it impossible for transgender youth to receive medical care related to their gender identity. These medical care bans irreparably harm transgender youth. **Decisions about this care, which is essential to the well-being of transgender youth, should rest with physicians, parents, and the patient—not politicians.**

These bans typically prohibit doctors from providing certain medical care to transgender youth, while allowing the same care (for example, prescribed hormone therapy) to be provided to minors who are not transgender. Physicians who provide this care to transgender youth face threats of professional and sometimes criminal sanctions, including loss of their medical license and even arrest and prosecution.

This guide provides layered approaches for conversations that can help audiences understand why this care is so vitally important for transgender youth, and why banning it is so harmful.

While these approaches are primarily intended for use in opposing health care bans, they can also be adapted to emphasize the importance of this care for transgender youth.

NOTE: Before speaking out against efforts to ban health care for transgender youth, contact the legal and/or policy organizations leading the challenge to ensure your messaging aligns with the specifics of the law or proposed legislation under discussion, as the specifics of health care bans often vary.

APPROACH #1: EMPHASIZE HOW BANS HARM BOTH TRANSGENDER YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS

When making the case against health care bans, start by helping people understand just how extreme these bans actually are. Not only do they ban prescribed care for transgender youth, they also take away parents' ability to ensure their child can receive medically necessary care that is endorsed by all the nation's leading medical authorities:

- *This is one of the most extreme political attacks on transgender people in recent memory. Not only does it ban medically necessary care for transgender youth, but it also allows the state to overrule parents who are trying to get their child the medical care they need—care that is supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, and every other leading U.S. medical professional association.*

Also, broaden the conversation so that people can recognize how politicians are putting the well-being of transgender youth at risk by banning this essential care:

- *Politicians in our state are putting the well-being of transgender youth at risk. Being a kid is hard enough. We*

don't need politicians making it even harder for kids who are transgender, denying them essential care and singling them out for increased bullying and harassment.

- *Transgender youth, like all youth, have the best chance to thrive when they are supported and can get the prescribed health care they need when they need it. The politicians behind this dangerous ban are taking that care away from transgender youth in our state.*

APPROACH #2: EMPHASIZE THE ROLE OF PARENTS & FAMILIES IN THE PROCESS

Like most parents, the parents of transgender youth want what is best for their child—including the ability for their child to receive the medical care they need. **But the politicians pushing these bans are also trying to overrule parents and shut them out of a process that rightly resides with medical providers, parents and the patient:**

- *Just like any other parents, the parents of a transgender youth should have the freedom to ensure their child can receive the prescribed medical care they need. Politicians shouldn't be able to overrule parents who need to access essential care for their transgender child. This decision should rest with physicians, parents, and the patient—not politicians.*

When emphasizing the role of parents and families, it can be also helpful to acknowledge that our audience may have difficulty understanding what it's like to have a transgender child—while emphasizing the values that connect all parents:

- *It can be hard to understand what it's like to have a transgender child. Parents of transgender children, like most parents, want to do what is best for their child—and that includes ensuring that their child is able to receive the health care they need.*

APPROACH #3: FOCUS ON THE BENEFITS OF HEALTH CARE FOR TRANSGENDER YOUTH—NOT JUST THE HARMS OF DENYING IT

It's important to emphasize the harm of denying essential care to transgender youth. But it's equally and critically important to focus on how that care protects the well-being of transgender youth and gives them the chance to thrive.

Don't just focus on the negative; always pair discussions about the damage caused by these bans with an equal emphasis on benefits that the care brings to the lives of transgender youth. Narrowly focusing on the harms caused by banning this medical care and support can inadvertently suggest that the lives of transgender youth are defined by those harms and the negative outcomes that result. **The reality is that transgender youth can thrive when they are supported by their families and receive the health care they need.**

- *When transgender youth, like all youth, receive the medical care they need, they are able to thrive and have healthy, happy childhoods that set them up for success in life.*
- *Denying medical care and support to transgender youth puts them at increased risk of serious harms, including depression, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts or behavior.*
- *Research also shows that when families support their transgender kids, those kids are much less likely to be depressed—and they show significant increases in self-esteem and general health.*

In legal contexts, it's important to also connect the dots from these medical care bans to the discrimination against transgender people that they represent:

- *As a nation, we decided long ago that discrimination is wrong and that everyone should have the same opportunities to succeed in life—and that should include transgender youth. Discriminating against transgender youth by denying them the care they need makes it harder for them to thrive and have happy, healthy childhoods that set them up for success in life.*

APPROACH #4 (WHEN APPLICABLE): ILLUSTRATE THREATS TO PROVIDERS

In most states with health care bans, medical providers are targeted with sanctions for providing the care that they're ethically and professionally called on to provide. **When illustrating these threats to providers, check with legal experts to ensure that the sanctions are accurate based on a particular state's ban.**

- *This health care ban punishes medical providers who follow standards of care for transgender patients—standards that are endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, and every other leading U.S. medical professional association.*
- *Under this ban, medical providers could lose their license for fulfilling their ethical obligation to provide medically necessary care that is essential to the health and well-being of transgender youth.*
- *[If the ban includes criminal sanctions] This health care ban is also about criminalizing medical care providers. Under this law, the government could arrest and imprison medical providers for up to [# of] years simply for providing needed health care to transgender youth in accordance with the oath they take to care for their patients.*

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Reinforce the medical necessity of this care. Referring to medical care (e.g., essential medical care, prescribed medical care, the medical care they need) reinforces the vital necessity of this care for transgender youth. Once this medical necessity has been established, we can also talk about *health care* or simply *care*.

Leave in-depth medical conversations to physicians and providers. Conversations about transgender youth care can quickly get into levels of detail that only medical providers are equipped to address. If this starts to happen, return to a focus on how health care bans hurt transgender youth and their families; for example: *"I'm not a doctor, but what I know is that the government should not be overruling parents who are trying to ensure their child receives the health care they need."*

Avoid sweeping or categorical statements about complex aspects of transgender youth medical care. Care for transgender people is individualized, and different stages of care might happen at different ages, so citing specific ages or including words like "always" and "never" in your messages makes them easy for anti-LGBTQ opponents to attack.

Don't follow anti-LGBTQ opponents down their rabbit holes. If you need to navigate questions on the specifics of medical care, consider the following and then return to the main approaches:

- *Medical care for transgender youth is provided after extensive evaluation of a young person and their needs by medical and mental health providers and consultation with the youth's parents on treatment options. If hormone therapy or puberty-delaying medication is then prescribed, the medical team monitors for side effects and adjusts the care as needed. All the leading medical associations in the U.S.—including the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics—endorse this care because scientific research shows it is effective and essential to the health and well-being of transgender youth.*

And if opponents try to change the subject with talk of detransition, explain the following—and, again, return to the main approaches:

- *This is extremely rare. Doctors and mental health professionals carefully monitor the course of care and make changes—if they're needed—to ensure the patient is always receiving the right care. Medical experts agree: the solution is to continue ensuring rigorous training and guidelines, not to ban essential medical care for people who need it.*