

Human Rights Campaign: Rebukes Wisconsin lawmakers over passage of legislation attacking transgender students

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MADISON — The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) — the nation’s largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) civil rights organization — criticized the passage today of legislation by the Republican-controlled Wisconsin Senate that would allow lawsuits to be filed against school districts or school officials over the use of students’ chosen names or pronouns.

The passage of the bill comes after [a recent survey](#) showed that 72.5% of LGBTQ+ people in Wisconsin had reported experiencing depression in the prior two weeks. [Politicians are culpable for the harm they cause](#) by subjecting vulnerable youth to continued legislative attacks.

“To subject school officials to lawsuits simply for supporting their students and working to build an inclusive, healthy environment is discriminatory and harmful,” **said Human Rights Campaign Wisconsin State Director Wendy Strout.** “It flies in the face of best practices put forth by mental health and child development professionals. Forcing students to endure the wrong name or wrong pronouns, day in and day out, will only serve to further increase the already alarming statistics on depression among LGBTQ+ people in Wisconsin. We ask Governor Evers to veto this regressive, damaging piece of legislation.”

The legislation passed in the Assembly and Senate as AB 963; both chambers are controlled by Republican majorities. The bills are being driven by malicious conservative groups such as the Institute for Reforming Government and the

Alliance Defending Freedom, organizations devoted to turning back the clock on LGBTQ+ rights.

The Southern Poverty Law Center [has designated the ADF](#) as a national hate group for its longstanding opposition to the LGBTQ+ community. Their work includes efforts to criminalize LGBTQ+ relationships, opposing settled laws like marriage equality, and even opposing the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”

Anti-LGBTQ+ bills Not Supported by Majority of People

[Polling has shown](#) that the majority of the population is on the side of equality — supporting non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people. But Republican politicians have seized on anti-equality rhetoric as part of a larger, concerted effort by former Trump officials and far-right media consultants to turn children of color and LGBTQ+ children into chess pieces for political gain.

State legislators are weaponizing trans youth and using these bills to score political points, rather than fix an actual problem. These laws are discriminatory and unconstitutional.

Caught in the crosshairs of anti-LGBTQ+ elected officials’ divisive political strategy are kids who are simply trying to navigate their adolescence — kids who face relentless targeting and increased levels of discrimination in their community, as evidenced by the record incidents of fatal violence against transgender and gender non-binary people in 2021.

Anti-Transgender Attacks As A Political Talking Point

Legislators in a [record 34 states introduced 147 anti-transgender bills in 2021](#), focusing on discriminatory anti-equality measures to drive a wedge between their constituents and score short-term political points. In 2021, legislators in twelve states enacted anti-LGBTQ+ bills [despite failing to provide examples of what exactly they were legislating against](#).

Merely introducing anti-transgender bills and peddling anti-transgender rhetoric has already had a damaging impact, leading to [LGBTQ+ youth resources being surreptitiously removed from a government website, 11-year old kids literally having trouble sleeping, and a school district banning graphic novels with a transgender character after a parent’s complaint](#). 2021 and 2020 were the deadliest

and second deadliest years on record for trans & gender non-conforming people respectively, with the Human Rights Campaign tracking [more than 50](#) violent deaths in 2021 alone. [A new Trevor Project survey](#) shows that a startling 85% of transgender or gender non-binary youth say their mental health has been negatively affected by these legislative attacks.

Anti-transgender content on social media is also [a radicalizing issue all by itself](#). This is in large part because transgender young people are among the most marginalized, voiceless, and defenseless communities in America, and because right-wing arguments play on long-standing misogynistic, racist, and sexist tropes about gender roles.

Anti-Equality Forces Are Spending Big

These bills are the result of a concerted effort by right-wing organizations that have been battling against LGBTQ+ progress for years. Across recent elections, one of the key anti-equality groups working to turn back decades of LGBTQ+ progress has been the American Principles Project (APP). APP and its chief underwriter Sam Fieler have invested millions of dollars in support of anti-LGBTQ+ candidates. In 2020, APP spent more than \$2.6 million in ad spending in support of anti-equality candidates. In Virginia in 2021, [APP spent at least \\$300,000 on digital advertising](#) in support of Glenn Youngkin's gubernatorial campaign.

Restoration PAC, run and funded by major anti-LGBTQ+ bankroller Dick Uihlein, [spent at least \\$1.9 million in advertising across Virginia in support of Youngkin](#) and donated \$942,000 to the political arm of anti-abortion group Women Speak Out Virginia. Anti-equality group [Free to Learn Action launched a \\$1 million ad campaign](#) spreading widely debunked anti-transgender misinformation in support of Youngkin's campaign.

Businesses, Advocacy Groups, and Athletes Oppose Anti-Trans Legislation

[More than 150 major U.S. corporations](#) have stood up and spoken out to oppose anti-transgender legislation being proposed in states across the country. Companies like Amazon, American Airlines, Apple, AT&T, AirBnB, Dell, Dow, Google, IBM, Lyft, Marriott, Microsoft, Nike, and Paypal have objected to these bills. [Four of the largest U.S. food companies](#) also condemned "dangerous, discriminatory legislation that serves as an attack on LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly transgender and nonbinary people," and the [Walton Family Foundation issued a statement](#) expressing "alarm"

at the trend of anti-transgender legislation that recently became law in Arkansas.

Many are rightly protective of the legacy of women's sports in this country, and a robust Title IX is central to that legacy. Importantly, advocates for women and girls in sports – such as the National Women's Law Center, the Women's Sports Foundation, Women Leaders in College Sports, and others – support trans-inclusive policies and oppose efforts to exclude transgender students from participating in sports. So do prominent female athletes including Billie Jean King, Megan Rapinoe, and Cheryl Reeve. That's because while there are real issues facing women's sports, including a lack of resources devoted to supporting them, transgender participation in athletics is not one of them.

[The nation's leading child health and welfare groups](#) representing more than 7 million youth-serving professionals and more than 1,000 child welfare organizations released an open letter calling for lawmakers in states across the country to oppose dozens of bills that target LGBTQ+ people, and transgender children in particular.

[Nearly 550 college athletes have stood up to anti-transgender legislation](#) by demanding the NCAA pull championships from states that have enacted anti-trans sports laws.

Trans Equality Is Popular Across All Demographics

The reality is that however sensational and polarizing this issue may seem, public opinion polling across the country showed strong support for trans-inclusive and pro-equality policies:

[Recent PRRI data](#) shows a large majority of Americans (82%) favor laws that protect LGBTQ+ people from discrimination in jobs, public accommodations, and housing, and majorities of Republicans (67%), independents (85%), and Democrats (92%) favor nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ Americans.

[A PBS/NPR/Marist poll](#) states that 67% of Americans, including 66% of Republicans, oppose the anti-transgender sports ban legislation proliferating across 30 states.

[In a 10-swing-state poll](#) conducted by the Human Rights Campaign & Hart Research Group in 2020 showed:

- At least 60% of Trump voters across each of the 10 swing states say transgender people should be able to live freely and openly.

- At least 87% of respondents across each of the 10 swing states say transgender people should have equal access to medical care, with many states breaking 90% support
- When respondents were asked about how they prioritized the importance of banning transgender people from participating in sports as compared to other policy issues, the issue came in dead last, with between 1% and 3% prioritizing the issue.

[Another poll conducted](#) by the Human Rights Campaign & Hart Research Group revealed that, with respect to transgender youth participation in sports, the public's strong inclination is on the side of fairness and equality for transgender student-athletes. 73% of voters agree that "sports are important in young people's lives. Young transgender people should be allowed opportunities to participate in a way that is safe and comfortable for them."

The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people. HRC envisions a world where LGBTQ+ people are embraced as full members of society at home, at work and in every community.