As developmental scientists, we are alarmed at the recent rise in state legislation across the United States that would harm the health and well-being of more than forty-five thousand transgender and non-binary children and youth. While these legislative efforts are varied, we see them as consistently rooted in longstanding, persistent, and destructive bias and discrimination against transgender people.

Transgender children and youth are at heightened risk for experiencing violence and harassment. In a recent survey, 54% of transgender and gender diverse youth reported being verbally harassed, 24% were physically assaulted, 13% were sexually assaulted, and 17% left school because of maltreatment. Research indicates that transgender and nonbinary children and youth are more vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and engaging in self-harm, including suicide, than their cisgender peers.

The legislation being proposed includes limiting access to gender-affirming healthcare, including puberty blockers, hormone treatment, and surgery, in some cases regardless of parental consent; forbidding students from using the restroom at school consistent with their gender identity; preventing transgender youths’ participation in sports; requiring school employees to inform parents about their child identifying as transgender; and more. Transphobic policies and practices run counter to research that documents the critical impacts of gender-affirming health care, supportive communities, and protective school policies for transgender children and youth. Their access to, and use of, affirming medical and social interventions improve their health and development and reduce their long-term psychological risks, including the risk of suicide. Policies and practices that exacerbate environments for transgender children and youth
therefore have the potential of leading to greater harassment, mental distress, and increases in suicidality.10 11 12

The Society for Research in Child Development is committed to advancing developmental science and promoting its use to improve human lives. Developmental science makes clear that access to medical services and supportive gender-affirming environments benefit the health and wellbeing of transgender children and youth.

Footnotes:


3 Respondents represented individuals from kindergarten through 8th grade who were out or believed to be out.


