

## Anti-transgender legislation poses mental health and safety risks for transgender and gender diverse (TGD) youth and their families.

### *At-a-Glance*

- Gender-affirming social environments and medical care are essential for the positive development and mental health of TGD youth and their families.
- Counter to scientific evidence, state and federal policymakers in the U.S. have introduced hundreds of bills to exclude TGD youth and their families from social life and suppress or criminalize affirmation.
- Anti-TGD exclusions and restrictions are associated with higher risk of anxiety, depression, suicidality, and victimization among TGD youth and their families.

### *Policy Considerations*

- Research shows that policymakers', caregivers', and school officials' support and affirmation of young people's gender identity is associated with better well-being for TGD youth and their families.
- There is no research that substantiates the need for anti-TGD policies, and growing evidence demonstrates the deleterious impact of these policies on the mental health of TGD youth and their families.
- Eliminating anti-TGD policies will reduce harm to TGD youth and their families; passing supportive and protective policies will foster positive development and health.

## TGD youth policy and discourse must rely on accurate, up-to-date scientific evidence.

There is definitive consensus from researchers and physicians on the importance of affirming and supporting TGD young people.<sup>1,2</sup> Evidence-based gender affirming social supports and medical care are recommended by over 20 major national medical associations and linked to improvements in TGD young people's health and well-being.<sup>3, 4</sup> Yet, policy debates and public scrutiny of TGD youth are rife with persistent misinformation.<sup>5</sup> Policies on transgender health care and social inclusion must be based on accurate, up-to-date scientific understandings of key findings, such as:

- For youth seeking gender affirming medical care, gender identity is largely unchanging and unlikely to result in regret, nor is it brought on by social trends or peer behavior.<sup>4</sup>
- When following professional standards, gender affirming medical care is evidence-based, safe, and well-understood.<sup>2,4,6</sup>
- Social acceptance of TGD youth measurably reduces suicide risk, depression, and violence exposure.<sup>1,7,8,9</sup>
- There is no definitive empirical evidence that TGD youth's sports participation is harmful or unfair to non-TGD athletes.<sup>10</sup>

## Anti-TGD Policies are Harmful to Youth and Their Families.

Day-to-day manifestations of discriminatory social environments, including anti-TGD bullying, harassment, and assault, contribute to chronic stress for TGD individuals and their families—with significant negative mental and physical health implications.<sup>11,12,13</sup> Such effects are likely more pronounced for TGD youth and families of color, who face the compounding harms of racism, xenophobia, risk of poverty, and transphobia in jurisdictions where anti-TGD laws are most common. In this environment, daily activities that cisgender and gender-conforming youth may take for granted, such as going to the bathroom at school, are a source of stress and even physical danger for TGD youth.<sup>14,15</sup> Recent data demonstrate that the introduction of a single anti-transgender law in a state is associated with a 7–72% increase in suicide attempts among TGD teenagers.<sup>11</sup>

When such social discrimination enters the realm of politics and law, the risk of psychological distress becomes more widespread. There has been a sharp increase in anti-TGD laws in recent years. In 2025, over 1,000 anti-trans bills were considered by legislatures across the country; 125 bills were passed into law, an over 500% increase since 2021.<sup>16</sup> Currently, 53% of trans youth in the U.S. – nearly 400,000 adolescents – live in states with restrictive TGD laws or policies.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, less than 40 percent live in states with “shield laws” proactively protecting gender-affirming healthcare, highlighting significant geographic variation in policy environments.<sup>16</sup>

## Family Members of TGD Youth Face Complex Distress in Anti-Transgender Environments.

TGD youth have more positive mental health outcomes when families support their children’s gender identity, including reduced rates of depression and psychopathology.<sup>3,18</sup> For many young people, parental acceptance is an important factor that determines whether they have access to social and/or medical transition during childhood and adolescence.<sup>3,19</sup> Whether and how families affirm their TGD children’s identity, however, is also a product of the sociopolitical environment. As policymakers implement more economic, social, and legal barriers to gender affirming care for children, parents experience heightened anxiety and depression.<sup>3</sup> When faced with these barriers and stressors, families actively consider relocation to states with a more supportive policy environment. In 2022, nearly half of all transgender people in the U.S. considered relocation to a new city or state due to anti-TGD policy.<sup>20</sup> Such a response underscores the ways in which policymakers may be underestimating the human capital and economic costs associated with anti-TGD policy.<sup>21</sup>

## Reducing Harm and Promoting Healthy Development Requires Inclusive, Supportive Policies for TGD Youth and Their Families.

Within an increasingly anti-TGD sociopolitical context, legislative analysis should account for the documented impacts of policies that restrict or exclude TGD youth and their families, particularly when such policies diverge from the established scientific evidence base. Enacting legislation to affirm and support inclusion for TGD youth and their families supports positive development and wellbeing, examples of which include requiring insurance coverage for gender affirming medical care, collecting and protecting secure data on TGD youth and families, and ensuring equal inclusion in social environments, such as classrooms, medical settings, and gendered facilities. The choice to advance anti-TGD legislation and rhetoric unnecessarily risks further psychological and physical threats for TGD youth and their families. The Society for Research on Child Development’s 2022 Statement of Evidence provides a relevant, evidence-driven framework for informing policy-related decision-making.<sup>1</sup>

# Acknowledgements and References

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## Authors

Samuel Abbott, M.P.P.  
M.D. Bishop, Ph.D.  
Jessica N. Fish, Ph.D.  
Dalal Katsiaficas, Ph.D.

## SRCD Staff Contributors

Becca Murdoch, M.P.P.

## Reviewers

Lionel Howard, Ed.D.  
Sabra Katz-Wise, Ph.D.  
Kacie M. Kidd, M.D., M.S.  
Jenifer K. McGuire, Ph.D., M.P.H.  
Fernando Salinas-Quiroz, Ph.D.  
Russell Toomey, Ph.D.

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<sup>1</sup> American Psychological Association. (2024). APA Policy Statement on Affirming Evidence-Based Inclusive Care for Transgender, Gender Diverse, and Nonbinary Individuals, Addressing Misinformation, and the Role of Psychological Practice and Science. <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/transgender-nonbinary-inclusive-care>.

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