

# AN UNPRECEDENTED NUMBER OF *LEGISLATIVE ATTACKS* HAVE MADE 2021 **THE WORST YEAR** IN RECENT HISTORY FOR **LGBTQ+ RIGHTS**

LGBTQ+ youth, and specifically transgender youth, were the target of a series of bad bills designed to deny and invalidate their existence. Under the guise of so-called “parental rights” and protecting youth, efforts by lawmakers nationwide continue to affect our youngest members of the community across key areas of life, including education, athletics, and healthcare.

## EDUCATION

Schools have an obligation to provide safe and affirming learning environments for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. State legislatures, however, made numerous attempts to deprive students of a diverse and inclusive education. Lawmakers considered bills encouraging the censorship of LGBTQ+ materials in libraries and those that threatened to penalize school staff for providing confidential support to LGBTQ+ students. Youth in Tennessee will find it more difficult to obtain an education that is inclusive of all experiences after the passage of SB 1229, a bill requiring parental notification before the teaching of a curriculum that includes discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity. In addition to making it harder for students to access

comprehensive sex education, it could preclude discussion about sexuality more broadly, including in literature and history classes.

The singling-out of sexual orientation and gender identity in the classroom disproportionately disadvantages LGBTQ+ youth, who may already feel ostracized at home or in their communities. Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth of color experience additional stress and adverse effects to their health and wellbeing because of bias around their intersecting identities. Legislation banning the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which seeks to erase non-white and non-heteronormative experiences from the historical record, exacerbates these problems.

## HEALTHCARE

Every child deserves equal protection and treatment when accessing health services, no matter who they are. Unfortunately, trans youth face enormous challenges when attempting to access life-saving healthcare. Legislators across the country worked together to deny transgender children access to medically necessary and age-appropriate healthcare measures. In doing so, they dismissed science, and ignored the expertise of medical professionals and child welfare advocates.

The data is undeniable. Research continues to demonstrate that when transgender youth have access to gender-affirming services, competent care and affirmation, their risk of depression, anxiety and other negative mental health outcomes is greatly reduced.

In a year that marked a devastating record of violence against transgender and gender non-conforming people, the coordinated effort by state lawmakers to exclude trans youth from healthcare is unconscionable and cruel.

## ATHLETICS

Sports play an influential role in the lives and identities of young athletes. However, despite the growing visibility of LGBTQ+ athletes and officials, and the incremental gains in professional and collegiate sports, youth sports continue to lag dangerously behind. This year, state legislatures specifically targeted trans youth by passing bills to prevent them from participating in sports teams consistent with their gender identity and denying access to sex-segregated spaces like restrooms.

A growing number of states, including Alabama, Mississippi, Montana, Tennessee, and West Virginia enacted anti-trans sports bills, demonstrating their commitment to harming the well-being of one of our most vulnerable populations. Even in states without legislative sports bans, trans athletes are often at the mercy of trans-exclusive school athletic policies that

require so-called “proof” of their gender. In some cases, this may mean providing an amended birth certificate. In others, it necessitates evidence that a young person has received medical care that may not be consistent with best practice gender-affirming care. This patchwork of harmful state legislation and school policies is confusing, unnecessarily invasive, and unapologetically attempts to erase transgender people from public life.

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LGBTQ+ youth are experiencing unprecedented marginalization from multiple angles. Amid a pandemic that has exacerbated the effects of anti-LGBTQ+ stigma and discrimination, it is essential that we create environments that are safe, supportive, and inclusive of all children.

