



DON'T MESS WITH TRANS KIDS

BY MIRANDA
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TO PARENTS, IF YOU ARE CONTACTED BY DFPS:

Imagine, you are the parent of a transgender or gender non-conforming child in Texas. One day, the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) shows up at your door claiming that you are under investigation for alleged child abuse due to the fact your child is receiving gender-affirming care. This is the fear that is being felt by the families in the trans and non-binary community. For some, it has become a reality. According to KSAT 12, the state has opened at least five child welfare investigations since Gov. Greg Abbott issued the directive on Feb. 22. The actual number of cases may be much higher.

On March 1, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Texas, ACLU and Lambda Legal have sued the state of Texas to block the state from investigating parents who support their transgender kids. These organizations filed the lawsuit on behalf of the parents (the mother is a DFPS employee) and their transgender daughter, who already have had an investigator and a licensed psychologist arrive at their home.

Texas' leaders are attempting to scare parents into submission by threatening to take away their child and criminalize them for providing gender-affirming care. Parents are left with choosing between love or fear.

Affirming a child's gender identity leads to lower levels of suicide, depression and anxiety.

Choose love, choose life.

On Feb. 18, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton expressed opinions attacking gender-affirming health care for transgender children, calling it "child abuse." In response, Abbott released a letter directed to the Texas Depart-

1. DELAY AS LONG AS POSSIBLE; BE COOPERATIVE BUT DELAY.

2. CONTACT ACLU OR LAMBDA LEGAL FOR A PRO BONO ATTORNEY LIST.

3. CONTACT EQUALITY TEXAS, SO THEY CAN STAY APPRISED ON THE ADVOCACY FRONT.

4. DO NOT HAND OVER ANY SAFE FOLDERS OF MEDICAL DOCUMENTATION.

5. DO NOT SIGN ANYTHING.

6. MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD KNOWS THEY HAVE A RIGHT TO NOT TALK TO ANYONE, AT SCHOOL OR ANYWHERE ELSE.

Disclaimer: For the safety of their family, the interviewee asked for their initials to be used.



“It’s [Abbott’s directive and Pax



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ment of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS) to investigate the families of transgender and gender diverse youth, echoing Paxton's child abuse accusations. In his letter, Abbott called on "all licensed professionals" and "members of the general public" to report parents of trans youth to the authorities if they appear to provide gender-affirming care or they will face criminal penalties for failure to report. What makes it worse is DFPS said they would be investigating these claims.

"It [Abbott's directive and Paxton's opinion] has created a sense of state-sanctioned harassment," said A.C., mother of a non-binary child.

Why criminalize and penalize parents for loving and supporting their child? In less than a year, there have been several San Antonio children who were killed by people who were supposed to love and protect them. Dying of starvation, being tortured and beaten to death are actual causes for child services to be involved. Those who suffer at the hands of their parents and

guardians are the ones who deserve DFPS's intervention. Advocates for these murdered children have come out saying that these kids would've been alive if DFPS and police followed through on their reports. This leads me to question, is there a lack of resources, little funding, high caseloads and a shortage of caseworkers? If so, then why divert resources into investigating the families of transgender children?

Let's call Paxton's opinion and Abbott's directive for what it is... fear-mongering. The key with these opinions is to scare people into believing transgender kids are the enemy. This is an attempt to detract from Paxton's and Abbott's failures as Texas's so-called "leaders." These opinions and directives though not legally binding are extremely detrimental to the rights of transgender and nonbinary individuals and their families.

“Paxton's opinion]has created a sense of state-sanctioned harrassment.”

I spoke with the mother of a non-binary child about the current state of affairs. “It feels like you might walk through your community and not know who you can trust,” said A.C.

We talked about the importance of keeping a safe folder. A safe folder is documentation on their child that contains medical records, letters from medical professionals that confirm a child’s gender identity and the stability of the family, legal documents and letters to your child that affirm their identity.

“Safe folders are documentation that you are not a child abuser. At this point they have been life-saving, given the governor’s directive. It’s sad that parents have to prove that they are good parents to this government entity,” said A.C.

A.C. and other families of transgender children are feeling forced into having conversations with their kids that they never wanted to have or wanted to wait until they were older to have.

“I had to talk about what DFPS is? What is child abuse? If someone comes to school and tries to talk to you at school, what are your rights? Those conversations have imparted a lot of harm and fear,” said A.C.

Anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation is not a new concept. Last legislative session, there were over 30 anti-LGBTQ+ bills filed, 13 of which specifically targeted transgender youth. Of these bills, only HB25 passed, this law requires children in public schools to play on sports teams based on the sex listed on their birth certificates, effectively banning transgender and non-binary students from playing on teams that align with their gender identity.

“Trans people and their families are exhausted. They have been fighting for this for so long with low levels of support and low levels of visibility. Everybody is so close to burn out,” said A.C.

Looking at the basis for these anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-trans arguments and attempts to limit their rights, it often boils



down to religion and personal opinions. What happened to separation of church and state?

As a result of Abbott’s directive, Texas Children’s Hospital, the nation’s largest pediatric hospital, has halted gender-affirming care for fears of the legal ramifications. Texas Children’s Hospital is not the first to bend to conservative backlash. Last November, the Children’s Medical Center Dallas shut down GENECSIS, a gender-affirming program, after being accused by protesters that they are committing child abuse. When we look at the science and research, providing gender-affirming care has been proven to reduce levels of suicide ideation, suicide attempts and lower rates of depression and anxiety among LGBTQ+ youth. In December 2021, researchers for the Trevor Project published a study in the “Journal of Adolescent Health,” finding that gender-affirming hormone therapy lowers the risk of depression and suicide rates among transgender and nonbinary youth. This finding was also confirmed by a recent study published in the Journal of American Medical Association





(JAMA).

“Mental Health Outcomes in Transgender and Non-binary Youths Receiving Gender-Affirming Care,” found that providing gender-affirming hormones and/or puberty blockers to trans and nonbinary youth was associated with 60% lower odds of moderate or severe depression and 73% lower odds of suicidality.

At the time of writing this article, State District Judge Amy Clark Meachum has issued a statewide injunction

blocking Abbott’s directive to have DFPS investigate parents of trans children for providing gender-affirming care. Though this may seem like a win, the fight for trans rights is still present.

“I’m begging people to pay attention. I’m begging people to stay outraged,” said A.C.

“ Choose **LOVE**, Choose **LIFE**.”