

OLIVE

CALL ME

Here's Olive Maurstad's story — from Marksman to proud female teacher, she has persevered through both internal and external struggles. In light of Governor Abbott's letter, community members share their initial reactions.



TAKING NOTES Former student Olive Maurstad '16 now teaches English at Fusion Academy Dallas, an institution that prides itself on its one-on-one personalized education for each individual student. The school's educational philosophy has three main pillars: love, motivate and teach. Olive enjoys working there because of the personalized focus and accepting culture.

Olive Maurstad '16 doesn't have a lot of memories from her time at St. Mark's. She doesn't have a lot of memories from her eight years here. Or her four years in the Classics Club. Or her four years on the *ReMarker*.

There's something going on inside of me. I don't know what it is. I don't know if anyone else feels this way.

Olive, formerly known as Aidan, is a transgender woman.

"I kind of just ... checked out ... of being a person for a while," Maurstad said. "From my recollection, it was unthinkable that there would be a trans student walking through the halls."



RECIPE FOR SUCCESS Olive Maurstad tutors one of her students on how to write a five-paragraph analytical essay at Fusion Academy Dallas.

The blank spots ended for Maurstad when she got to Pomona College, a small liberal arts school in southern California.

"Not to disparage St. Mark's in any way, but it

was a lot different," Maurstad said. "When I was there, I met other transgender people. It was like a lightbulb went off in my head — I could do that, too."

During her sophomore year of college, Maurstad slowly began to transition into a woman: identifying as female around certain groups of people before expanding those groups and eventually moving to more physical changes.

"I wanted to take my time to make sure I knew what I was doing," Maurstad said. "But there were also so many hoops I had to jump through to get started. I began taking hormones four years ago in August."

Hormone replacement therapy, i.e. taking estrogen and anti-androgens (medication that suppresses testosterone), is one of the many ways that transgender people move forward in their transition process, alongside choices like surgery or legally changing their name. Maurstad remembers how difficult it was to initially receive her prescription.

"The whole process is an endless humiliation," Maurstad said. "You have to stand before all these different people and ask them, 'Can I have this medication that will save my life?' And they'll say, 'I don't know. Tell me the most vulnerable things about you.'"

When asked about coming out, Maurstad described it as a "really weird process."

"It's terrifying, even when you know the person will react well," Maurstad said. "Because you can never know if they actually will. Also, we act like coming out is 'one and done' because of how it's phrased. But, the more I go through life, the more I realize that you never stop coming out. There are always people who you'll have to share this vulnerable part of yourself with."

When she first approached her parents, she had

imagined writing a letter detailing all of her feelings and motives.

"What ended up happening is my mom said, 'You should get a haircut, your hair is really long.' I was like, 'Oh, actually, I can't do that. Because I want to grow it out. Because I'm trans. Bye!'" Maurstad said. "Afterwards, we all sat down to have a long conversation about it, and continued to process for six more months."

Looking back on it now, Maurstad finds it difficult to remember what her actual transition was like. Having lived as a woman for so long, she recognizes how strange the process is.

"When you're in the early stages of transitioning, you're so constantly aware of like, 'I'm saying I'm a girl, but I look like a boy. People must think I'm a lunatic,'" Maurstad said. "At least for me, the person who was most doubtful of my transition was myself."

As far as adversity goes, Maurstad feels that she's been lucky. She hasn't lost any friends, and even the particularly religious side of her family has been accepting. On a larger scale, however, she finds it scary to live in Texas as a trans person.

"I don't want to sound like I'm catastrophizing, but every time I see something trans-related in the news, I get a little closer to leaving the state," Maurstad said. "With every measure that passes I think, what next?"

Most recently, Governor Greg Abbott ordered investigations into parents and licensed facilities that provide gender-affirming care to transgender minors. Abbott's order was based on Attorney General Ken Paxton's recent non-binding interpretation of the law, which classified puberty blockers, hormone therapy and surgical care as child abuse.

"I had been teaching a class, and when class ended I found the news alert on my phone,"

Maurstad said. "I was reading through the letter, and I froze. My first thought was 'Oh my god. What am I going to do about my trans students?'"

Speaking to impressions she's seen following Abbott's directive, Maurstad emphasized that "doctors aren't handing out hormones like candy." "In Texas, that couldn't be farther from the truth," Maurstad said. "There's all this fear-mongering, claiming that the trans agenda wants to give estrogen to five-year-olds. No — there is no medical intervention until the age where puberty might onset, and even then, the intervention is only delaying

teachers and caregivers to let the parents know if their child expresses that they're trans," Maurstad said. "I don't have the statistics in front of me, but trans youth are far overrepresented in the homeless population because their parents kick them out. It feels like intentional cruelty because if a kid is talking to a teacher about being trans, there's a good chance it's because they know their family won't be accepting."

Stephanie Anderson, mother of former St. Mark's and current Harvard-Westlake student Sylvee

FROM LETTER to LAW

Talking with District Attorney John Creuzot about Abbott's letter surrounding trans youth.

What does the letter mean?

It directs the Department of Family and Protective Services to investigate the families and care providers of transgender children, citing Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's opinion of what constitutes child abuse. Further, he calls for "licensed professionals" and "members of the general public" to report suspected cases of parents assisting transgender minors seeking gender-affirming treatment and procedures. "Anything related to gender issues could potentially be child abuse," Dallas District Attorney John Creuzot said. "And that included counseling, medication... it didn't seem to exclude anything."

What are the legal ramifications of this declaration?

Absolutely none. No court in the U.S. has said that gender-affirming care constitutes as child abuse. "[The letter] doesn't impact the courts," Creuzot said. "Their announcement is void, since it doesn't really mean anything as far as the law is concerned."

We're talking about doctor-patient relationships and parent-child relationships, and criminalizing these relationships when someone is seeking help.

So what are the effects of the letter?

"It impacts the relationships between the person and therapist, because therapists can be accused of child abuse by just meeting and by guiding and giving therapeutic advice," Creuzot said. "It doesn't necessarily have to have an impact in the courtroom to affect someone's life. Just the mere statement that it's illegal can cause other people to stop assisting." After the letter was sent out, UT Southwestern closed the only youth transgender clinic in the region.

What now?

A Texas Third Court of Appeals, presided by Judge Amy Clark Meachum, has reinstated a temporary injunction, prohibiting the state from investigating parents providing gender-affirming care. Any further enforcement of Abbott's directive is blocked until the litigation is resolved.

pubescence."

She also emphasized how inaccurate she feels the narrative around hormone therapy is.

"People talk about how hormone therapy will create irreversible, lifelong changes," Maurstad said. "It actually takes a long time to do anything. When I started it, it took six months for physical changes to even begin. There's almost this trial period built into the medication, where you have months to figure out whether it makes you feel more comfortable psychologically."

Maurstad doubled down on her thought that it isn't neutral to not medically intervene.

"If a child who is expressing that they are trans is forced to wait, they'll go through a very traumatizing time," Maurstad said. "Imagine if you, as a man, started growing breasts and menstruating. You'd be telling the people around you, 'This stuff is happening with my body that I don't want to happen,' and they'd respond 'Just wait. It's fine.'"

One specific part of Abbott's letter stood out to Maurstad as particularly dangerous.

"The letter requires teachers and caregivers to let the parents know if their child expresses that they're trans," Maurstad said. "I don't have the statistics in front of me, but trans youth are far overrepresented in the homeless population because their parents kick them out. It feels like intentional cruelty because if a kid is talking to a teacher about being trans, there's a good chance it's because they know their family won't be accepting."

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Anderson, made the decision to move her family out of Texas to keep her transgender child safe.

"When we started hearing about the possibility of prosecution for parents and caregivers, it really bothered us," Anderson said. "We didn't think those bills would pass, which they didn't, but it's hard enough to be a teenager. And to be a teenager under that much political pressure? It would've been really difficult for Sylvee."

As the Andersons began conversations with the school about their plans to leave, Stephanie felt very appreciative of the support they received.

"As she began her transition, we felt that St. Mark's wasn't

going to be the best place for Sylvee," Anderson said. "Society as a whole hasn't really figured out what to do with transgender children who go to single-sex schools. What was nice for us is that we never felt rejected — we were having very respectful, caring conversations with them, but just decided that it would be better for Sylvee to find another place to go to school."

With the implications of Abbott's letter, Hockaday junior Annie Hurley, co-chair of her school's Queer Student Union, feels horrified for her brother Julian, who used to attend Hockaday, and other trans individuals in the state of Texas.

"If you can't come out at home, and you can't come out to your family, then you're going to try to find communities at school or with people that are going to accept you," Hurley said. "But if your teachers and doctors are going to have to contact CPS [Child Protective Services] and tell your parents, it creates a feeling of absolute isolation and distrust because there's no one to reach out to."

Hurley's co-chair Hockaday junior Aubrey Burns, a transgender male himself, hopes to be able to receive gender-affirming surgery before he leaves for college. Following the news, he has noticed a lot of fear among his trans friends.

"I know this can be very, very scary for the trans community — I'm feeling that fear myself," Burns said. "But, I just want to remind the readers, allies and supporters that we are stronger than this. We have survived much worse than this. These new policies and letters coming out surrounding trans individuals may be extremely harmful, but it's no use backing down. This is just fuel to keep fighting back and standing together. Now is not the time to feel disheartened."

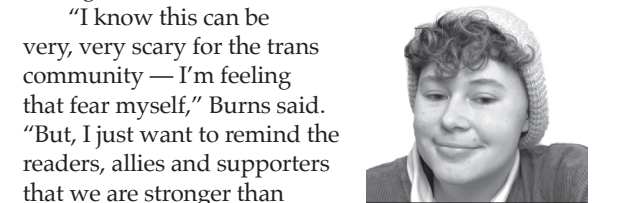
Acknowledging that Abbott's letter is not law, Maurstad still fears for how much more restrictive Texas laws will get — what is the path forward for transgender Texans?

"We will get through this how our community has gotten through everything — together," Maurstad said. "The one thing that really keeps me here in Dallas is how consistently inspired I am by the solidarity between queer people. Everyone just wants to keep each other safe."

STORY Austin Williams, Peter Orsak, Jonathan Yin, Toby Barrett, Keshav Krishna
PHOTOS Sal Hussain



ANNIE HURLEY
Hockaday Queer Student Union co-chair



AUBREY BURNS