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Aug. 29, 2022

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Protecting Trans Youth: National Center for Youth Law, Disability Rights Texas Call on Texas Court of Appeals to Strike Down Hateful Policy

All children — regardless of gender expression or identity — deserve to live, without fear, surrounded by families that support them. Unfortunately, youth and their parents are under attack in the state of Texas.

In standing with young people who are transgender, nonbinary or experiencing distress related to their gender, the National Center for Youth Law and Disability Rights Texas, together with pro bono counsel Kuhn Hobbs and several other organizations, submitted an amicus — or friend of the court — filing today with the Texas Third District Court of Appeals that calls on the court to put a stop to Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's statewide directive to launch investigations into families that seek gender-affirming medical care for a child. The filing highlights the unique harms that families experience when they are investigated or have any contact with a child welfare agency, even if no further adverse actions are taken against them.

The brief — which can be [read in full here](#) — is in support of *Doe v. Abbott*, a legal challenge to Abbott's policy. Although backers purport the policy is meant to protect children, its actual purpose is to instill fear, break up families, and prevent young people from accessing medically necessary care.

"This Texas policy is malicious, dangerous, counterproductive and heartbreaking," said Brenda Star Adams, directing attorney at the National Center for Youth Law. "Texas leaders are wildly misguided in claiming they are protecting children. What they are actually doing is putting real children's lives at risk and destroying families physically, emotionally and financially. The Texas Court of Appeals needs to send a message that bigotry does not overrule health and wellbeing."

Meredith Shytlés Parekh, supervising attorney of the Foster Care Team with Disability Rights Texas, noted the effect the state policy has already had on Texas families and communities.

"Trans youth are already at heightened risk of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation," Parekh said. "Adding the very real risk that their family may be investigated or separated has sent some youth into acute crisis requiring hospitalization. Others are terrified to receive the care they need for fear of being removed from their families, and are afraid to share those fears with therapists and counselors who might report them. Abbott's policy is placing Texas youth lives in danger, and preventing them from accessing resources to potentially save them."

Supporting Texas youth and their healthcare

Gender-affirming healthcare — the very care the Texas policy treats as abuse — has been shown to reduce depression and rates of suicide in transgender youth, both long and short term.

Discouraging youth from seeking this care, and punishing them by investigating and potentially removing them from their families if they do, will only serve to increase those rates of depression, mental illness and suicide ideation.

Further, families face unjust and undue harm when investigations are launched against them, even if the investigation ends with no formal charge of abuse, as is the case in about 75% of Texas DFPS inquiries. Even the threat of an investigation can lead families to forgo seeking critical services they need and would otherwise utilize.

Investigations are also often a financial burden for families. This is particularly troublesome, as families at lower income levels are investigated at disproportionately high rates.

Instead of supporting youth and family unity, the Texas policy seeks to further stigmatize transgender children, take them out of supportive family environments, and put them through the trauma of investigation, family separation and foster care. Experts know and agree that this is directly contrary to child protection and welfare and will disproportionately impact transgender Black, Indigenous, multiracial, and Latine youth, as well as youth with disabilities.

Doe v. Abbott marks an opportunity for the Texas Third Court of Appeals to stand up for the health and wellbeing of these youth, their families and their communities.

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The National Center for Youth Law centers youth through research, community collaboration, impact litigation, and policy advocacy that fundamentally transforms our nation's approach to education, health, immigration, foster care, and youth justice. Our vision is a world in which every child thrives and has a full and fair opportunity to achieve the future they envision for themselves. For more information, visit www.youthlaw.org.

Disability Rights Texas is the federally designated legal protection and advocacy agency (P&A) for people with disabilities in Texas established in 1977. Its mission is to help people with disabilities understand and exercise their rights under the law, ensuring their full and equal participation in society. Visit www.DRTx.org for more information.