Supporting LGBTQ+ Students in the Face of Discriminatory Legislation

On behalf of school psychologists, school nurses, school counselors, school social workers, student service administrators, psychologists, and parents throughout the state of Florida, we jointly write this memo of support in solidarity with LGBTQ+ students following their tremendous leadership and advocacy with the #DSGWalkout in response to HB1557 Parental Rights, also referenced in the media as the “Don’t Say Gay” Bill. We also stand with our colleagues in schools across the state who supported the rights of students to peaceful assembly in protest.

As school-based and community-based mental health professionals, it is important to recognize that even the introduction of this type of legislation has consequences. Specifically, 94% of LGBTQ+ students said that recent politics had negatively impacted their mental health with more than 40% reporting having considered suicide in the previous year.¹ Devastatingly, nearly half of all students reported desired counseling from a mental health professional but have not been able to receive it. Our primary concern over the “Don’t Say Gay” Bill is that students will now fear being outed by school staff and even less likely to access help.

We also know that it is incumbent upon us to help. Schools should be welcoming, safe, and inclusive places for youth, families, and staff members who identify as LGBTQ+. We know that youth who have access to spaces that affirm their identities are much less likely to attempt suicide.² As mental health professionals, it is not only our ethical obligation to provide that safe space for students but also to advocate for these safe spaces. We also have an ethical obligation to fight against bills like HB1557 that stand in direct contrast to our values as mental health professionals, our codes of ethics, and legislation which endanger youth.

What can we say to LGBTQ+ youth now?

- I’m here for you.
- You matter.
- You are valid.
- I support you.
- We’re going to advocate for you.
- I see you, hear you, and value you.
- You are wonderful just the way you are.

What can we do now to support students and their families?³

- Support your local GSA and PFLAG chapters. If the schools in your community don’t currently have a GSA, consider starting one now. Our youth need support and connection.
- Make your support visible with graphics and posters.
- Follow organizations including the National Association of School Psychologists Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth page, Equality Florida, GLSEN, The Trevor Project, Transgender Law Center, National Center for Transgender Equality.
- Honor and celebrate transgender students on March 31st during the International Transgender Day of Visibility.
- Check out additional resources:

  - The National Association of School Social Workers Press Release with Resources as well as Legal Precedents
  - Human Rights Campaign Welcoming Schools
  - Equality Florida's Safe & Healthy Schools Project
  - Call Him Hunter Ally Moms
  - American Medical Association’s Preventing Suicide in LGBTQ+ Youth
  - National Health Law Program Help Prevent Suicide Among LGBTQ+ Youth

¹ The Trevor Project National Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health. https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/
³ Adapted from the National Center for School Mental Health
What can we do now to protect students and families?

- It is not too late to ask the governor to **VETO THIS BILL**! Remind him of the First Lady’s initiative to improve mental health for youth and the harm that this bill brings to the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth across the state of Florida.
- While all school-based professionals must defer to their district’s supervisors and legal teams, we encourage you to **educate yourselves regarding legal precedent** around the rights of LGBTQ+ youth.
- We also encourage you to seek support from your respective state professional associations and your colleagues. We are here for you too. We will support you in the work you do to support youth. We will continue to organize to ensure that ALL of Florida’s youth feel safe, welcomed, valued, and loved.

In solidarity,

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