

Rhode Island House of Representatives
House Health & Human Services Committee

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing to **vehemently oppose House Bill No. 7884**, the "Rhode Island's Children Deserve Help Not Harm Act," which seeks to prohibit gender transition procedures for minors, restrict the use of public funds for such procedures, and penalize healthcare providers who offer gender-affirming care to minors. As a concerned member of the community, deeply invested in the well-being of transgender and gender-nonconforming youth, I urge you to reject this harmful legislation.

Gender-affirming care is not merely a medical intervention; it is a lifeline for transgender and gender-diverse youth, profoundly impacting their social and psychological well-being. Denying access to gender-affirming care denies these youth the opportunity to live authentically and hinders their ability to thrive in society. Here are some critical aspects of gender-affirming care that are vital for the social and psychological well-being of transgender and gender-diverse youth:

Mental Health Support: Gender dysphoria, the distress experienced by individuals whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth, can lead to severe mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Gender-affirming care, including therapy and counseling, provides crucial support for youth as they navigate their gender identity, helping them build resilience and cope with societal stigma and discrimination.

Social Transition Support: Social transition allows transgender and gender-diverse youth to live authentically by affirming their gender identity in everyday life. This includes using their chosen name and pronouns, dressing in a manner that aligns with their gender, and accessing spaces where they feel safe and accepted. Social transition is essential for fostering a sense of belonging and self-esteem among transgender youth, mitigating the harmful effects of social rejection and isolation.

Puberty Blockers: For adolescents experiencing gender dysphoria, the onset of puberty can exacerbate distress as their bodies develop secondary sex characteristics incongruent with their gender identity. Puberty blockers offer these youth the opportunity to delay physical changes, providing invaluable time for exploration and decision-making regarding their gender identity without the added stress of irreversible bodily changes.

Inhibition of Healthcare Providers' Jobs: Punishing healthcare providers for offering gender-affirming care inhibits their ability to fulfill their ethical duty to prioritize the well-being of their patients. It creates a chilling effect that dissuades healthcare professionals from providing essential care to marginalized communities, further exacerbating the barriers to healthcare access faced by transgender and gender-diverse youth.

By prohibiting gender-affirming care, H7884 denies transgender and gender-diverse youth access to essential support and resources, perpetuating harm and discrimination. Every young person deserves the right to live authentically and receive affirming care that honors their gender identity. As legislators, it is your duty to prioritize the well-being of all youth in Rhode Island, including transgender and gender-diverse individuals.

I urge you to reject H7884 and affirm the rights and dignity of transgender and gender-diverse youth in our state. Thank you for considering my testimony on this crucial issue.

Sincerely,

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