



For Young LGBTQ+ Lives

Via email to [HouseHealthandHumanServices@rilegislature.gov](mailto:HouseHealthandHumanServices@rilegislature.gov)

April 9, 2024

In opposition to H 7884

Dear RI House Health and Human Services Committee,

The Trevor Project writes to **oppose H 7884** (An Act Relating To Health And Safety – Rhode Island's Children Deserve Help Not Harm Act – Minor's Gender Transition), which would impose unnecessary and harmful barriers to essential medical care for youth. Not only are these barriers contradicted by established medical standards of care, access to transgender medical care has been associated with significantly lower odds of suicide risk among transgender and nonbinary youth, a particularly marginalized population. For these reasons, we urge you to oppose this bill.

The Trevor Project is the leading suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) young people. We work to save young lives by providing free and confidential 24/7 crisis services via phone, text, and chat. We also operate TrevorSpace, the largest safe space social networking site for LGBTQ+ youth, as well as innovative education, research, and advocacy programs.

**Transgender medical care is established medical care.** The latest standards are set forth by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) and are based on decades of clinical research and experience. Their efficacy is additionally demonstrated by the positive impact that transgender people who have access to the care report on their mental and physical health.<sup>1</sup> This is why every major medical and mental health association has affirmed the validity and importance of the WPATH standards of care for transgender patients, including

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<sup>1</sup> World Professional Association for Transgender Health, Standards of Care Version 8 (2022), available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/26895269.2022.2100644>.

The Trevor Project  
PO Box 69232  
West Hollywood, CA 90069

[info@thetrevorproject.org](mailto:info@thetrevorproject.org)  
[www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)

youth.<sup>23456</sup>

The field of medical care for transgender and nonbinary youth continues to build on this strong foundation, and is evolving as is the case in all areas of medical science; it is essential that we allow medical professionals to continue to establish best practices of care, rather than freeze in time the standards outlined in the proposed rule that already contradict established standards of care.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 14, and the third leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds in the United States, and we know that transgender and nonbinary young people are significantly more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. **In Rhode Island, 42% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered suicide and 17% attempted suicide in 2022.**<sup>7</sup> However, we also know that trans youth are not prone to suicide simply because of their gender identity. Increased experiences of victimization and discriminatory policies – like this proposed rule – can contribute to higher risk for anxiety, depression, and attempting suicide among trans youth.

**Fortunately, access to transgender medical care can protect the lives of transgender youth.** Transgender medical care for youth, such as hormone therapy, is associated with positive mental health outcomes including showing promise for reducing suicide risk. In February 2022, the Journal of the American Medical Association published new research that found transgender medical care for transgender teens was associated with 60% lower odds of moderate or severe depression and 73% lower odds of suicidality over a 12-month follow-up.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, this life-saving care is not easily accessible for transgender youth: the average wait time for treatment in the United States is 10 months.<sup>9</sup> The Trevor

<sup>2</sup> American Medical Association, American Medical Association Fights to Protect Health Care for Transgender Patients (2021), available at <https://www.ama-assn.org/health-care-advocacy/advocacy-update/march-26-2021-state-advocacy-update>.

<sup>3</sup> American Psychiatric Association, et al., Frontline Physicians Oppose Legislation That Interferes in or Criminalizes Patient Care, American Psychiatric Association (2021), available at <https://www.aapf.org/news/media-center/statements/frontline-physicians-oppose-legislation.html>.

<sup>4</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Pediatrics Speaks Out Against Bills Harming Transgender Youth (2021), available at <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2021/american-academy-of-pediatrics-speaks-out-against-bills-harming-transgender-youth/>.

<sup>5</sup> Endocrine Society & Pediatric Endocrine Society, Discriminatory Policies Threaten Care for Transgender, Gender Diverse Individuals (2020), available at <https://www.endocrine.org/news-and-advocacy/news-room/2020/discriminatory-policies-threaten-care-for-transgender-gender-diverse-individuals>.

<sup>6</sup> American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, AACAP Statement Responding to Efforts to Ban Evidence-Based Care for Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth (2019), available at [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Latest\\_News/AACAP\\_Statement\\_Responding\\_to\\_Efforts-to\\_ban\\_Evidence-Based\\_Care\\_for\\_Transgender\\_and\\_Gender\\_Diverse.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Latest_News/AACAP_Statement_Responding_to_Efforts-to_ban_Evidence-Based_Care_for_Transgender_and_Gender_Diverse.aspx).

<sup>7</sup> The Trevor Project, 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health - Rhode Island, available at <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Trevor-Project-2022-National-Survey-on-LGBTQ-Youth-Mental-Health-by-State-Rhode-Island.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Diana M. Tordoff, et al., Mental Health Outcomes in Transgender and non-binary Youths Receiving Gender-Affirming Care 5(2) JAMA (2022), available at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2789423>.

<sup>9</sup> Diana M. Tordoff, et al., Factors Associated with Time to Receiving Gender-Affirming Hormones and Puberty Blockers at a Pediatric Clinic Serving Transgender and non-binary Youth, J. Transgender Health (2022), ahead of print, available at <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/trgh.2021.0116>.

Project's research and direct experience serving youth in crisis reveals many trans youth actively want medical and mental health support but cannot get it for various reasons, including cost. **The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health found that 50% of LGBTQ youth in Rhode Island who wanted mental health care were not able to get it.**<sup>10</sup> These proposed rules would further exacerbate the lack of access to essential health care that transgender youth in Rhode Island already suffer. State laws should not become one more, often insurmountable, barrier to care.

The science is clear, and what young people tell us at The Trevor Project is even clearer: denying trans young people transgender medical care harms their mental health and can put them at greater risk of suicide. When asked about proposed legislation that would ban doctors from prescribing gender-affirming medical care like puberty blockers or hormone therapy, 73% of transgender and non-binary youth said it made them feel angry, 57% felt sad, 47% felt stressed, 40% felt scared, and more than 1 in 3 felt hopeless, helpless, and/or nervous.<sup>11</sup> **In Rhode Island, 90% of LGBTQ+ youth surveyed in 2022 reported that recent politics negatively impacted their wellbeing either sometimes or a lot.**<sup>12</sup>

Instituting this rule to deny best-practice care to young people diminishes care and tells trans youth that they are not accepted in Rhode Island. All youth, including trans and nonbinary youth, deserve to feel safe and accepted in their community while getting the care they need and deserve.

For these reasons, The Trevor Project strongly opposes H 7885. Should you have any questions or if we can be of any assistance regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me at [Janson.Wu@TheTrevorProject.org](mailto:Janson.Wu@TheTrevorProject.org).

Sincerely,



Janson Wu

Sr. Director of State Advocacy and Government Affairs

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<sup>10</sup> The Trevor Project, 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health - Rhode Island, available at <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Trevor-Project-2022-National-Survey-on-LGBTQ-Youth-Mental-Health-by-State-Rhode-Island.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> The Trevor Project, New Poll Illustrates the Impacts of Social & Political Issues on LGBTQ Youth (2022), available at <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/blog/new-poll-illustrates-the-impacts-of-social-political-issues-on-lgbtq-youth/>.

<sup>12</sup> The Trevor Project, 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health - Rhode Island, available at <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Trevor-Project-2022-National-Survey-on-LGBTQ-Youth-Mental-Health-by-State-Rhode-Island.pdf>