

## *Joint Statement in Support of Transgender Youths and Their Families*

The Common Reader Program, Women's and Gender Studies Program, Latinx and Latin American Studies Program, Humanities Program, and Liberal Arts Department publicly state our support for age-appropriate, evidence-based standards of care for transgender youth. As educators and researchers living and working in Texas, we deem gender-affirming health care to be of vital importance in promoting the physical and mental wellbeing of our state's youth. On February 21st, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton issued a non-binding legal opinion claiming that providing youths certain kinds of gender affirming medical care constitutes child abuse under state laws. Days later, Texas Governor Greg Abbott called on licensed professionals, such as doctors, nurses, teachers, and therapists, as well as the general public, to report suspected cases of minors receiving gender-affirming care, with the potential for criminal penalties if suspected cases are not reported. He also directed the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and other agencies to investigate parents of children receiving such care.

Attorney General Paxton and Governor Abbott's non-binding opinions are part of a wave of recent state policies and proposed legislation targeting transgender and non-binary youths, such as House Bill 25, which bars transgender students from playing on sports teams that align with their gender identity. The cumulative mental health toll on Texas youths is incalculable. Transgender youths already experience stigma, violence, bullying, and harassment. Denying necessary medical care compounds the psychological and physical impact of historical and contemporary institutionalized and societal discrimination and puts children at greater risk of depression, anxiety, and even suicidality. Recent [research](#) shows that gender-affirming care decreases depression rates among trans youth by up to 60% and can decrease suicidality by up to 73%. We, as teachers, feminists, parents, caretakers, leaders, prioritize children's mental and physical health.

### *Efficacy of the Statements*

Despite their rhetoric, Attorney General Paxton and Governor Abbott's statements can compel neither the public nor licensed professionals with direct contact with youths to report suspected cases of gender-affirming care. The ACLU of Texas contends that "they cannot curtail anyone's constitutional rights." Ryan Kercher, an attorney with Paxton's office, also concedes that the governor's order and the earlier opinion do not require the state to investigate every transgender child receiving gender-confirmation care. Despite the lack of authority, these opinions masquerade as law, terrorizing professionals with direct contact with transgender youths and endangering transgender youths' access to life-saving care that is thoughtfully crafted in consultation with teams of medical healthcare experts and parents and guardians.

Texas Children's Hospital has already paused some hormone treatments out of concern that its medical staff and parents of patients might be targeted.

In fact, leading child development experts and pediatricians, from the American Medical Association to the Society for Research in Child Development, endorse gender-affirming medical care as life-saving and an essential component in creating a supportive environment for transgender and non-binary children to thrive. We reject attempts to criminalize parents providing evidence-based support for their children. We will continue to advocate for inclusive communities and protective school policies for transgender youths, and by extension, all Texas children.