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LGBTQ+ AMERICANS FIGHT BACK: A GUIDEBOOK FOR ACTION



During the last several years, lawmakers across the United States have ramped up efforts to restrict the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and families. These attempts have ranged from restricting access to restrooms for transgender people, to permitting discrimination against LGBTQ+ people by child welfare agencies, to banning what kinds of characters can be represented in books shared in elementary classrooms. In 2023, we entered a new phase of legislative attacks, with bills passing in many states designed to erase entire communities of people under the law. These new laws create dangerous situations and keep people from being able to participate in public life.

More than 525 anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been introduced in 41 states in 2023 alone, with 220+ specifically targeting transgender youth. 22 states have passed laws restricting how transgender children can participate in sports. 19 states have some kind of ban on gender-affirming healthcare for transgender and non-binary minors this year, with one additional bill on a governors' desks as of this report's publication. 10 states have restricted restroom access for transgender students, and Florida has additionally outlawed all transgender people from using restrooms in publicly-owned spaces, which includes airports, convention centers, government buildings and more. In 2 states, bans have been enacted to restrict drag shows and 4 additional states have passed laws that will likely have a chilling effect on drag performances as well as pride events. In 11 states, school personnel can either misgender transgender students, be forced to "out" them to their parents — even if that puts the student in danger at home — or be bound by "Don't Say LGBTQ+" laws that restrict their ability to even acknowledge the existence of LGBTQ+ people. Several states have combined administrative attacks on transgender youth and their families with legislative attacks, including Florida, Missouri, and Texas. Several of these laws have been enjoined by federal courts, and dozens of additional lawsuits have been filed in recent months.

For many LGBTQ+ individuals and families, living in these states has become untenable. They are no longer safe. New laws eliminate their rights under state law and even criminalize parents who help their transgender or non-binary child access care. People in more than two dozen states are now facing hard questions: Do I stay and try to fight or do I flee to safety? Do I even have the means to flee if I want to? What do I do if I have no option but to stay? These are very personal decisions. The right answer for one family may not be the right answer for another. This guide is designed to support all individuals and families regardless of their choices or options.



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KNOW THE LAWS

There is a dizzying array of anti-LGBTQ+ laws on the books today. The chart below details some of the most significant laws impacting LGBTQ+ people across the country. In addition, to learn more, HRC details specific laws across all 50 states at [State Maps - Human Rights Campaign \(hrc.org\)](https://www.hrc.org/state-maps). Be sure to use tools like this to learn more about the laws in your state, in states you're visiting and in states you or a young person in your family may decide to go to school.

STATES	NON-DISCRIMINATION LAW (GOOD)	CONVERSION THERAPY BAN (GOOD)	GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE BAN (BAD)	BATHROOM BAN (BAD)	SPORTS PARTICIPATION BAN (BAD)	LGBTQ+ ERASURE LAW (BAD)	"DON'T SAY LGBTQ+." LAW (BAD)	PRONOUN REFUSAL LAW (BAD)	FORCED STUDENT OUTING LAW (BAD)	ANTI-DRAG BAN (BAD)
AL	N	N	Y*	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
AK	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
AZ	N	N	partial	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
AR	N	N	Y*	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N
CA	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
CO	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
CT	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
DE	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
DC	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
FL	N!	N	Y	Y**	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N
GA	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
HI	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
ID	N	N	Y	Y	Y*	N	N	N	Y	N
IL	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
IN	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N
IA	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
KS	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
KY	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N
LA	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
ME	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
MD	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
MA	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
MI	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
MN	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
MS	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
MO	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
MT	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
NE	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
NV	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
NH	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
NJ	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
NM	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
NY	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
NC	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
ND	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N
OH	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
OK	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N

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OR	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
PA	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
RI	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
SC	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
SD	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
TN	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y*
TX	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
UT	partial	Y	Y	N	Y*	N	N	N	N	N
VT	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
VA	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
WA	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
WV	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
WI	partial	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
WY	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
totals	24	21	20	9	23	4	5	7	6	1

State non-discrimination law affords non-discrimination protections to LGBTQ+ people. Note that Utah's law does not include places of public accommodation, and Wisconsin's law only explicitly covers sexual orientation, not gender identity. Enforcement authorities in Florida and Arizona have interpreted existing state law to have some implicit protections for sexual orientation and gender identity.

Ban Conversion Therapy. State law forbids the practice of discredited, abusive so-called “conversion therapy” for youth.

Ban on gender-affirming healthcare. This state has a law that bans the provision of best practice, age-appropriate health care for transgender youth. Several of these bans also forbid state employers and state health plans (including Medicaid) from being able to offer gender-affirming care as covered healthcare – denying transgender youth and adults from being able to access medically necessary health care simply because they are transgender. An * indicates that the ban is currently enjoined by a court and therefore not in effect at this time.

Prohibition of transgender people from using the restroom consistent with their gender identity.

Largely these bills are tied to schools – meaning that transgender students and adult school employees, parents, or others are most impacted. However, Florida adopted a bill more in the style of NC’s reviled HB2, banning transgender people from using the restroom consistent with their gender identity in any government-operated facility, including airports, publicly funded convention centers, government buildings and public schools. This is indicated with an **.

Ban on transgender students in school sports. Laws prohibiting transgender students from playing sports alongside peers sharing their gender identity, often effectively denying them the ability to participate in school sports at all. An * indicates that the ban is currently enjoined by a court and therefore not in effect at this time.

LGBTQ+ Erasure Law. Laws adopting a discriminatory definition of sex that, in reducing people to their reproductive abilities, eliminates a broad array of protections for LGBTQ+ people and women embedded throughout state law.

“Don’t Say LGBTQ+” Law. Laws that censor curriculum by prohibiting and/or effectively prohibiting the acknowledgement of LGBTQ+ identity, history, curriculum, or people in the classroom, impacting students, parents, staff, and the ability of students to learn.

Pronoun Refusal Laws. Laws that allow or require school personnel to deadname or refuse to refer to a student using their correct pronouns.

Forced Outing of Students Laws. Bills that would require school personnel – including teachers, coaches, school nurses, guidance counselors, and others - to “out” students to their parents, regardless of whether that would put a student at risk at home.

Anti-Drag Laws. These bills would classify drag performance as inherently obscene, and limit the performance of drag to adult-only spaces regardless of the content of the performance. An * indicates that the ban is currently enjoined by a court and therefore not in effect at this time.



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IF YOU DECIDE TO GO

If you have made the decision to leave your current state, there are many factors to consider to determine where to move and replant your roots. Beyond considerations such as job opportunities and ties to family or friends, some states might work better for your situation due to existing laws and policies, and within certain states, some municipalities might fit your needs better than others.

How to Identify Friendly States

Survey after survey show that Americans support LGBTQ+ equality, and Republicans are no exception. Still, Republican-dominated state governments have enacted an onslaught of anti-LGBTQ+ laws in recent years.

There are currently 22 states with Republican trifectas meaning that Republicans hold the governorship and majorities in both legislative houses. These states are increasingly hostile to LGBTQ+ people.

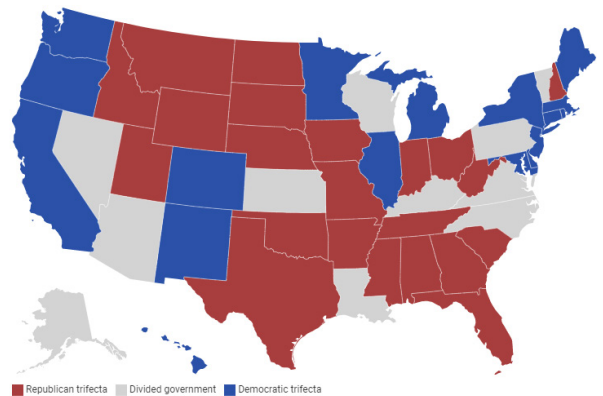
There are currently 17 states with Democratic trifectas. Most of these states offer some statewide nondiscrimination protections for the LGBTQ+ community, but not all have laws designed to support transgender and non-binary people in accessing identity documents and health care.

Eleven states currently have divided governments and as you might expect, their laws are more of a mixed bag.

Use the resources below to learn about states and municipalities, but do your own research about any areas you are interested in, such as searching recent news articles about towns, identifying LGBTQ+ centers or a list of local LGBTQ+ businesses or community groups, or following or joining social media channels for those areas.

- HRC's State Equality Index and Municipality Equality Index are tools that can help you assess which locations will provide you and your family with the protections that you need. They provide a snapshot in time and are updated annually. To supplement, an index of notable state laws can be found at the end of this report and maps detailing many of these laws are available here ([State Maps - Human Rights Campaign \(hrc.org\)](#)).
- The [State Equality Index \(SEI\)](#) is a comprehensive report of statewide laws and policies that affect LGBTQ+ people and their families, both good and bad. It recognizes states for their progress to protect the LGBTQ+ community and provides a scorecard to help people navigate the states that have adopted laws that would negatively impact their daily lives. Some of the laws and policies examined relate to parenting, such as second-parent adoption, surrogacy, and foster care non-discrimination. For youth, the index includes positive policies including anti-bullying policies, inclusive sex education, and protections from conversion therapy, as well as tracking negative laws and policies about transgender exclusion in sports, restrictions of LGBTQ+ topics in schools, and the prohibition of enumerated anti-bullying policies in schools. The SEI also tracks laws banning gender-affirming healthcare and exclusions for transgender healthcare in state Medicaid programs or insurance plans.

Current state government trifectas





- The [Municipality Index \(MEI\)](#) provides a deeper dive into the laws and policies in specific cities, including those in states without nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people. Given that the LGBTQ+ community is so diverse, it is impossible to rate the lived experience of LGBTQ+ people with any accuracy or objectivity, so the MEI does not try. Rather, the MEI rates municipalities based on the laws and policies that apply within the cities, as well as the services the municipality provides or supports and what kind of leadership the city has shown on matters of equality. Scoring criteria include whether the city has non-discrimination laws, how the municipality is as an employer, the relationship between law enforcement and the LGBTQ+ community, and if there are services and programs designed to benefit the LGBTQ+ population. If the city or town of interest to you is not included in the MEI, you can use the MEI scorecard (available at www.hrc.org/mei) as a guideline for what factors you may wish to consider.

Determine Your Access to Healthcare

Restrictions on gender-affirming healthcare for minors are one of the reasons that many families may need to move to a new state. Twenty states have adopted laws that bar minors from accessing gender-affirming care. The majority of those laws require an immediate end to treatment while a handful mandate timelines for weaning transgender minors off of puberty blockers and hormone therapy; even where treatment is allowed under some circumstances many are finding barriers to continuing care as individual providers and clinics are shutting down their practices. In addition, multiple states have enacted laws that impact the ability of adults to receive gender-affirming care, largely through limitations on public funding going to gender affirming care for those on Medicaid, those who are incarcerated, or in health benefit plans for employees of the state, public colleges, universities, or hospitals, and municipalities. Additionally, Florida eliminated the ability of advanced practice registered nurses and other qualified medical providers who are not physicians from providing gender-affirming care, resulting in even greater barriers. Some of these laws are not in effect as the result of active litigation. For individuals and families impacted by these laws, finding new homes where that critical healthcare can continue is key to decision-making.

Two tools that can help are HRC's Healthcare Equality Index and dynamic, searchable maps of LGBTQ+ friendly facilities and gender clinics that support transgender and non-binary youth.

The Healthcare Equality Index scores healthcare facilities in several areas: their use of an LGBTQ+ patient non-discrimination policy, visitation policy, employment non-discrimination policy, staff training in LGBTQ+ patient-centered care, and transgender-inclusive employee benefits to their employees.

Two interactive maps can assist with your search. The Healthcare Equality Index Rated Facilities map (found at <https://hrc.org/resources/healthcare-equality-index>) provides information on healthcare facilities that provided information to the Human Rights Campaign [or "to us"] for evaluation, are rated as leaders in areas of equality, and non-participant centers whose policies were researched by HRC staff. A second map can guide you to locations of hospitals or clinics with comprehensive care programs for gender-expansive children and adolescents (found at <https://hrc.im/clinicalcaremap>).

Keep in mind that some of the gender-affirming care providers and clinics have scaled back the level of information available on their websites, primarily in response to harassment by anti-LGBTQ+ extremists, so a phone call or in-person meeting may be necessary in order to fully assess whether they can meet your current healthcare needs. Further, the clinics and providers in the most welcoming states are managing larger than usual patient waiting lists, so you might consider taking steps to get enrolled as a new/transferring patient before you physically move to that new location just to get ahead of those waiting times.

Finding Work

Knowing which states will be safe for a family and where healthcare can be obtained is still only a part of the solution. The ability to find work in one of those states will be necessary for most individuals and families to complete a move. If your current employer cannot or will not allow you to work remotely or transfer to a location in another state, you may want to use HRC's Corporate Equality Index (CEI) in



your job search to focus your efforts or to research a company that has a job listing you are interested in pursuing.

The Corporate Equality Index scores companies based on four key pillars for an inclusive workplace; nondiscrimination policies across business entities, equitable benefits for LGBTQ+ workers and their families, supporting an inclusive culture and, corporate social responsibility. These criteria have evolved and will continue to change to meet the needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

Use the CEI to get a good idea of which employers you can trust with your career and family's needs when looking for a job. The helpful "Employer Search" feature allows you to search by company name or search by state, city, or zip code. Find the CEI at www.hrc.org/cei.

Financing a Move

Even with a job offer in hand and a plan on where to go, the costs of a move could still make the move a significant challenge or create additional hardships. There are several organizations working to fund moves in part or in whole through grants. If you need help to fund a move — or transportation to receive care — many organizations have been created in recent years to provide direct support to those seeking gender-affirming care, queer youth and other LGBTQ+ people impacted by hostile laws. As a starting point, you can review a list of emergency fund opportunities that we are tracking at HRC: <https://hrc.im/relocation>, which may have resources to offer you and your family.

Finding/Building Community

There is a reason the LGBTQ+ community encourages having "chosen family" — those people who are in your life, not because of biological ties, but for love and support, to celebrate you and help you no matter what. There has never been a better time to lean into those relationships and actively build more. People across the country understand why people are uprooting their lives and moving to places they have never even visited before and they are willing to help.

Here are some ideas on how to start finding resources and building a community before you have finished packing:

- ❑ Check the [CenterLink directory](#) to find LGBTQ+ community centers in the area you would like to settle. Many of those centers will have social media groups, online meetings, lists of resources, and will be able to answer questions you might have about the area via email. Join in, ask questions, make friends in advance of arriving.
- ❑ [PFLAG](#) has chapters all across the U.S. and is another resource for finding community. Because they are family-focused, they might be able to offer advice about specific schools in the area or pediatricians and family medicine practices that are LGBTQ+ friendly.
- ❑ Check out the schools in the area! The culture of a school district or specific school in a district often hinges on its leadership. Even in blue states, the amount of support and acceptance can vary widely. Look closely at the district policies — they should be posted online — and ask to join any closed social media groups the district/school has as a potential new resident. Visit [WelcomingSchools.org](#) for information about what to look for in a good school policy and for guidance on how to have conversations with school leaders.
- ❑ Join local community pages, especially any LGBTQ+-focused community pages, that you can find online. These are great spaces to ask questions like, "I need an LGBTQ+ friendly realtor. Any good recommendations?" or "What neighborhoods in the city would have families with elementary-aged kids and a lot of Pride flags outside the homes?" You might find great connections and have new friends ready to stop by with a welcome basket the day you arrive.



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IF YOU DECIDE TO STAY

There are many reasons to stay in one of the states passing anti-LGBTQ+ legislation: a good job or difficulty transferring to another location, close family ties or to assist with elderly family, a close-knit and supportive local community, and the desire to be part of the resistance and to organize get-out-the-vote and other advocacy initiatives.

It is important to remember that federal protections still exist under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. Many of the bills that have been passed into law are being challenged — and more will be challenged — in court by organizations including HRC. Several have already been found to be unconstitutional and there is a good chance more will also be found to be unconstitutional. Until those cases are resolved, there are many other actions you can take.

School Boards

School boards drive policy on all kinds of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. They have the power to approve or deny LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons, books, and programs. They often determine policies related to dress codes, discipline measures for anti-LGBTQ+ bullying incidents, and diversity in hiring. While school boards can be constrained by actions taken at the state level, they still have a wide range of control over the culture of schools in their care.

Unfortunately, school board elections receive very little attention from the voting public compared to how much of a direct impact they have on students. Anti-LGBTQ+ organizations have taken note of this and have been targeting local school boards to drive their agenda. Until a few years ago, it was rare to know a school board member's (or candidate's) political affiliation. That time has passed, as more and more anti-LGBTQ+ candidates at the local level are promoting their loyalty to Donald Trump and other MAGA Republicans to let voters know their anti-LGBTQ+ positions when it comes to the rights of students, teachers and parents.

According to the Department of Education, 50.8 million American youth attend public schools. Each of those schools have school boards, and more than 90,000 people serve on those boards. It's time for all of us to hold them accountable — or to join their ranks. Here are ways you can make a difference:

- **Attend meetings and speak up for LGBTQ+ people.** One of the easiest and most important ways to change what's happening at the local level is to show up and speak out. School boards hold meetings regularly and post their meeting times, locations and agendas publicly. Bring friends with you and speak about the importance of inclusion in your local community.
- **Research your local races, get to know the candidates, and vote.** Don't wait until a big election day to find out if there is a school board race on the ballot. Many Board of Education races have non-partisan primaries, which is a great time to vote to ensure that the contenders on the general election ballot are not all anti-equality candidates.
- **Support pro-equality candidates.** If you find a local candidate who has a positive position on LGBTQ+ rights and is promising to support all students, donate to their campaign and volunteer some time. Share their social media posts, or create your own to talk about them and why they should be elected. Encourage them and let them know that you are supporting them because of their equality message.
- **Challenge the anti-LGBTQ+ messages** by any candidates who campaign by repeating dangerous talking points. Press them to define and defend terms like "grooming" or "wokeness" and don't let them avoid answering questions on equality issues.



- ✦ **Run for the board.** Consider running for a seat on your local school board. If you are a parent, a former student of the district, or have professional experience that would benefit the make-up of the board, throw your hat in the ring. Don't let a fringe minority of anti-LGBTQ+ activists take up space that you could occupy.

File Complaints with Federal Civil Rights Offices

LGBTQ+ employees, patients, and students all have federal protections against harassment and discrimination. Unfortunately, harassment and discrimination still take place every day.

- According to research conducted in 2023 by HRC, over a quarter (28%) of LGBTQ+ workers, including over a third (37%) of transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC+) workers, have ever left a job because their work environment was not inclusive/accepting of LGBTQ+ people. Approximately 1 in 10 LGBTQ+ workers (8%), and TGNC+ workers specifically (12%), have ever been fired due to their LGBTQ+ identity, whereas a quarter (24%) of LGBTQ+ workers, and a third (32%) of TGNC+ workers, were passed over for a promotion due to their identity.
- In a survey conducted by the [Center for American Progress](#) in 2022, 15% of LGBTQ and 1 in 3 transgender people reported being denied care by a doctor or other provider because of their sexual orientation or gender identity within the last year. 30% of LGBTQ adults, and 51% of transgender adults, encountered at least one negative experience or form of mistreatment from a health care provider.
- According to the HRC/University of Connecticut 2022 LGBTQ+ Youth Survey, over half (51.6%) of LGBTQ+ youth, and TGNC+ youth specifically (55.6%), were bullied at school in the past year due to their sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender.
 - Almost six in ten (56.9%) LGBTQ+ youth, and TGNC+ youth specifically (59.5%) were bullied in the prior month, a fifth (18% LGBTQ+ youth; 20% TGNC+ youth) of whom were physically harassed, reporting other students hit or pushed them.

Under federal law, most employers with at least 15 employees cannot discriminate against employees and job applicants. Healthcare providers receiving federal funding or that are operated by the US Department of Health and Human Services cannot discriminate against patients. And federally funded schools cannot discriminate against students. This is all on the basis of sex, which includes discrimination based on sex stereotypes (gender expression), sexual orientation, and gender identity.

If you have faced harassment and discrimination, you can file a complaint. Most complaints must be filed within 180 days from when the incident occurred. If you are worried that filing a complaint will lead to even worse treatment, know that you and anyone who assists in the investigation will also be protected from retaliation.

Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC)

Active employees, former employees, and prospective applicants — for full-time, part-time, seasonal, and temporary work — can file a job discrimination complaint with the EEOC. Complaints can be filed regardless of a person's citizenship or work authorization status. You can also file a complaint on someone else's behalf to protect their identity or someone else can file on your behalf to protect your identity.

Discrimination against employees and job applicants may include: being fired, demoted, or not hired for marrying someone of the same sex or transitioning; failure to allow employees to wear gendered uniforms, or use bathrooms, showers, and locker rooms, that are consistent with their gender identity; unfair discipline against LGBTQ+ employees; segregating LGBTQ+ employees based on actual or perceived customer preferences; or denial of benefits and privileges such as health insurance for gender affirming care or for a same sex spouse or time off.



You don't need an attorney to file a complaint with the EEOC. Go to <https://www.eeoc.gov/how-file-charge-employment-discrimination> to file your complaint online or schedule an appointment to file in person. You can also begin the complaint filing process by calling 1-800-669-4000. In the complaint, be sure to specify that an employer discriminated against you or someone you know on the basis of sex. The more details you provide about the incident, such as the date(s), a description of the employer's actions, names of individuals involved, and clear descriptions of the discriminatory behavior, the more likely that the EEOC will be able to take action.

The EEOC will then send a letter to you and the employer to notify all parties that a complaint has been made. They will then begin to evaluate the complaint and investigate, during which time they may contact you to get further information.

Department of Health and Human Services

Patients who have faced harassment or discrimination while seeking or receiving healthcare from a provider that is operated by the Department of Health and Human Services or any provider that receives public funding (which includes almost every provider) can file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights. Additionally, the parents or caregivers of a person, healthcare employees, and other individuals and organizations can file a complaint on behalf of another person.

Discrimination against a patient may include: denial of gender-affirming care by a medical provider who provides the same care to patients who are not transgender, being turned away from routine or emergency care, refusal to allow a same-sex spouse or a transgender spouse to visit or make medical decisions, rough handling, and being subjected to slurs, taunts, stereotypes, or name-calling.

No lawyer is needed to file a complaint, however, incomplete or unsigned complaints will be dismissed, so it is important that you carefully read instructions for how to file. Visit <https://ocrportal.hhs.gov/ocr/smartscreen/main.jsf> to file a complaint online and select "Violation of Civil Rights" to get started. You can also file a complaint by mail, fax, or email by following the instructions at <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/filing-a-complaint/complaint-process/index.html>.

In the complaint, mention that the discrimination you faced was on the basis of sex and then provide as much detail as you can — dates/times, a description of the provider's actions or statements, names of individuals involved or who were witnesses, and a clear description of the discriminatory or harassing behavior. The more details you can provide, the better your chances of having the Office for Civil Rights take action.

Once the OCR determines if they have the legal authority to review your complaint (based on the type of provider being implicated), they can evaluate the complaint and fully investigate. During the investigation, they may follow up with you to get additional information.

Department of Education

Any student attending a school that received public funding — which includes nearly every public K-12 school and most colleges and universities — who believes they have been harassed or discriminated against for their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or because of sex-based stereotypes can file a confidential complaint with the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. A parent, teacher, family member, friend, or organization can also file a complaint on a student's behalf as long as the student gives written consent.

The OCR has made it clear that if a student is subject to harassment or bullying due to their gender and the school does not take appropriate action to stop it, that is a form of discrimination. Other examples of discrimination include a failure to allow a student to dress in a gender non-conforming way in a yearbook photo, at prom, or at school; failure to allow the use of restrooms and locker rooms consistent with a student's gender identity; harassment by educators; denial of privileges based on gender; or unfair discipline against LGBTQ+ students.



If you or a student in your life has faced any of those circumstances and wish to file a complaint, visit <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html>, read the instructions, and click “Continue to Electronic Complaint form” at the bottom of the page. The OCR will send a letter to you and the school notifying all parties involved that a complaint has been made. They can then evaluate the complaint through an investigation.

ADVOCACY IS NEEDED EVERYWHERE

No matter which state you live in now and where you end up in the future, advocacy for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community is critically needed. We cannot and will not stop until full-lived equality is the reality for every single LGBTQ+ person, regardless of where they call home. These efforts can be in the form of one-on-one conversations with your friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, and others to meetings with elected officials. [Get involved and stay involved!](#)

Know the Enemy/Opposition

Since 2015, state lawmakers have introduced nearly 1,700 anti-LGBTQ+ bills. At the same time, anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and violence have been increasing across the country.

This intense targeting of the LGBTQ+ community in state legislatures didn't happen organically. Powerful national anti-LGBTQ+ organizations are coordinating a multi-pronged attack to push LGBTQ+ people back into the shadows. Three organizations, in particular — Family Policy Alliance, Heritage Foundation, and Alliance Defending Freedom — are leading the charge.

- Family Policy Alliance is the lobbying arm of Focus on the Family, which was founded by James Dobson in 1977, and rose to prominence in the 1980s. Perhaps no one has spread the anti-LGBTQ gospel as widely, or with as much political impact, as Dobson has over the last four decades.
- The Heritage Foundation is a think tank that was founded in 1973 to combat communism and advocate for “conservative social values”. Heritage has had strong ties to all the Republican presidential administrations over the past five decades, including providing the blueprint to staff the Trump Administration. They argue in favor of offering a license to discriminate and oppose LGBTQ+ non-discrimination protections, marriage equality, and other pro-equality issues. They're often the go-to source for right-wing media and politicians looking to cite junk “studies” and unqualified “experts”.
- Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) was founded in 1994 and is designated as an anti-LGBTQ+ hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Since its founding, ADF has expanded its operations abroad as it battles abortion, LGBTQ+ equality, and what it considers the “myth” of the separation of church and state. ADF has supported the recriminalization of sexual acts between consenting LGBTQ+ adults in the U.S. and criminalization abroad, defended state-sanctioned sterilization of transgender people abroad, contended that LGBTQ+ people are more likely to engage in pedophilia, claimed that a “homosexual agenda” will destroy Christianity and society, and works to develop “religious liberty” legislation and case law that will allow the denial of goods and services to LGBTQ+ people on the basis of religion. ADF attorneys have led arguments at the Supreme Court in many key cases about LGBTQ+ rights. And they have money. In recent years, contributions to ADF more than doubled, from \$34.5 million in 2011 to more than \$76 million in 2021.

All three of these organizations created a new coalition in 2021 called “Promise to America’s Children”. This coalition convenes anti-LGBTQ+ lawmakers, gives them model legislation to introduce in their state, and testifies on behalf of bad bills. They even promise to pay for lawsuits if anti-LGBTQ+ laws are challenged in court.

One newer group on the scene is Moms for Liberty, founded in 2021 by Florida school board members in response to COVID-19 policies in schools. Within only a few months, their campaigns broadened to



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also focus on how racism and LGBTQ+ issues were discussed in schools, with a direct push to have curriculum restricted and numerous books banned. Their messaging often centers around “parental rights” while only promoting rights aligned with other anti-LGBTQ+ conservative Christian groups. To counter their messaging and attempts at school board takeovers, it is critical to organize progressive parents to stay involved in their local school boards and gain support from the broader community.

White Evangelical Christians are shrinking as a voting bloc, while the number of Americans who support LGBTQ+ people continues to rapidly grow. The pace at which LGBTQ+ equality has advanced has created a “last stand mentality” among some white Christian conservatives who are determined to re-establish their vision of a white Christian America by any means necessary.

Have Hard Conversations

Once you have an understanding of where the anti-LGBTQ+ attacks started and how they have been manufactured strictly to divide our communities and rile up extremists, it’s easier to have hard conversations, like addressing the myths versus facts on gender-affirming care with family or co-workers. When you are feeling more confident and comfortable, try engaging with strangers. (Sometimes this can actually feel easier because you don’t have a personal relationship and feel less invested in the outcome.) Later, reach out to elected officials about scheduling a meeting.

So how do you approach a tough conversation? Consider it the opening of a dialogue and the building of a relationship. Start by finding common ground: what are our shared values and where are we on the same page? Create space for the other person to openly discuss their concerns. You don’t need to be an expert on all subjects, but you can respond to those concerns using any number of helpful guides that HRC has created. Use this [chatbot to practice having conversations](#) about trans-inclusive sports. This guide can help you [set the record straight about gender-affirming healthcare](#). Visit the [Count Me In](#) page (and sign up!) for many other resources that help you separate myth from fact.

Once you have addressed some concerns, steer the conversation back to a more personal conversation. Ask them to put themselves in your or your family’s shoes. How would they feel if the situation were reversed and they were so misunderstood, judged, or targeted by lawmakers? Validate what you can — a lot of this is new information and it can feel confusing and disorienting, or even make them feel uncomfortable. But also invalidate the invalid — we do have data on these topics through a lot of research, there are places with affirming laws that show affirming care or gender-neutral restrooms are safe, or that being uncomfortable is not a reason to discriminate against someone else. Your goal is to provide resources and answers. Be someone they can ask for advice and want to call in the future.

Contact Your Elected Officials

Meeting with a lawmaker can feel daunting, but you have the skills to be effective. It’s important to know ahead of time that you may meet with an aide or staffer, not the elected official. Elected officials are busy people, and it is challenging to get face time with them. There’s no need to stress if you don’t get a meeting with the elected official—staff can be really important, too. A staffer can listen to your concerns and can be very influential when they report back to their boss. Don’t be intimidated by the setting. You requested the meeting, and it’s important to remember the people you will be speaking with work for you. Simply make your points, share your stories, make an ask (they will be expecting this, so don’t skip this step), and provide supplementary materials when you leave.

What if you already know the position of your elected official, can’t get a meeting because they aren’t eager to meet with you, or you’ve had a meeting that didn’t go well because they weren’t swayed by any of your points?

Don’t give up! Instead, focus on building a coalition and holding a “kitchen table” meeting with influencers.

The key to doing this is power mapping.



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Power mapping, in its simplest form, is a game of “who do you know?” and “how can who you know give you what you want?” Say a terrible anti-transgender bill has been introduced in your state. You, as a fierce advocate, want to defeat this bill.

Power mapping can help you determine:

- the best possible target — who has the ability, power, or resources to solve your problem
- what and who might persuade them to say “yes” to your request
- the pathways and/or relationships that can get you access to, or put pressure on, the target you’re attempting to influence

Research your target. What committees do they serve on? What are their voting records? Do they belong to any groups or associations? What, if anything, does this info tell you about their ideologies or values? Who are they connected to politically? Who is on their staff? Do they have any hobbies? How are they connected to other actors/decision-makers?

Determine relational power lines. You will find that many of the groups/individuals on your map are connected to each other AND to your target. Look for the power hubs, that is, the groups or individuals that are connected to a lot of other folks on the chart. Even if a power hub doesn’t connect directly to your target, it may still be useful depending on who it’s connected to and how many connections it has.

Now take this information and start reaching out. Request a meeting with the person you think will be most willing to listen and open to your position. Practice the skills you have built around having difficult conversations by finding common ground and forging a connection from there. Then keep going, expanding your reach to others who will have an influence on your ultimate target. With these influential people or organizations on your side, host a community kitchen table meeting — sit down to talk about the issues with stakeholders who share a connection with both you AND the decision-makers who can create the change we’re looking for.

Through these grassroots efforts, time, and determination, change can happen. We witnessed several victories in 2023 when only one or two legislators voted to stop anti-LGBTQ+ bills from passing because constituents kept talking to them, meeting with them, and providing them with the data and partnerships they needed to explain or defend their votes. Not being afraid to have hard conversations works. Building a coalition of fair-minded and influential people works. You can do it!

TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Despite how daunting some maps might look right now, do not give up hope. According to recent polling, 64% of likely voters believe there is too much legislation designed to limit the rights of LGBTQ+ people in America. In contrast to how many states are banning gender-affirming healthcare, 54% oppose these bans and this extreme government interference. 58% oppose laws that would restrict drag shows. And 60% of voting Americans believe middle school libraries should include materials related to gender identity and sexual orientation.

The American people are on our side.

As LGBTQ+ people and allies, we have a responsibility to fight for EVERYONE in our movement. Now is the time to get loud, get visible, and spread awareness on behalf of transgender and non-binary people. So please take the actions below – but don’t stop there. The more people who show they care, including allies and trans and non-binary people who speak up for the most marginalized in our community, the more hearts and minds we will change. Join HRC’s [Count Me In](#) movement to fight back today.