

“We can disagree and still love each other, unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression, and denial of my humanity and right to exist.” -James Baldwin

Trans Lives Are Not Up For Debate

Outright Vermont Stands with Trans Youth in Vergennes



Like many Vermonters, we have been dismayed to learn of the event called “Rethinking Transgenderism” being planned by representatives from a national extremist hate group, [“Parents’ Rights in Education.”](#) The event is to be held on the property of the Vergennes Union Middle/High School on Tuesday June 20th.

Let’s be clear: Events like this are blatant attempts to foment fear and weaponize parents and caregivers against LGBTQ+ youth, in service to an agenda that has nothing to do with the wellbeing of young people.

A far cry from 'promoting dialogue' this event is part of a coordinated, national smear campaign that aims to instill fear, censor and obscure the truth about trans lives, and justify deadly restrictions on the rights of LGBTQ+ people - especially youth. The organizers' choice to locate their hateful event inside the school building, where a policy loophole prevents the school from revoking their access, directly impacts the safety and welcome of LGBTQ+ students who spend the majority of their waking hours within those walls.

No matter where they live in Vermont, LGBTQ+ youth face violence and the constant threat of harm daily. Vermont politics and values are being co-opted in this coordinated, nationwide sweep of anti-trans rhetoric targeting youth. We are not and have never been immune. Trans youth do not need "rethinking," censorship, or more stigma and lies - they need honesty, love, and support!

The Truth is in the Numbers

Youth do not get a say in most decisions made about them, from their personal lives, to the policies and institutions that govern their lived experiences. These policies translate into the disparities we see reflected both broadly, as in empirical population-wide data, and deeply, as an individual young person's school day. The systems and structures LGBTQ+ youth navigate daily were never built for all of us to succeed. Who gets to exist without scrutiny and hypervigilance in their daily lives? Who shoulders that burden every day?

Population-level data like the Youth Risk Behavior Survey reveals what youth already know: that to protect them would mean ensuring, not attacking, their rights, preserving, not undermining, their safety, and protecting, rather than punishing, the family members, teachers, and healthcare providers who are some of their strongest allies.

Empowered with the truth, we can choose a path forward that is compassionate, evidence-based, and genuinely in the best interest of young people.

- [Research](#), [experts](#), and youth themselves agree: Gender affirmation is critical for the safety and wellbeing of young people.
- [Every major medical association](#) supports gender affirming care as effective, safe and lifesaving.

- Queer and trans people have always existed. If it seems like more and more youth are coming out, it is because generations of queer elders have fought and died for the safety and visibility to be ourselves openly.
- There is a lot of research that points to [the need for affirming care and the impact of political moves that position youth as pawns](#).
- [Increased outness](#) is associated with less depression and greater self esteem in LGBTQ+ youth, which could go a long way toward decreasing the health disparities between LGBTQ+ youth and their cisgender, heterosexual peers. Creating spaces where youth can freely be exactly who they are [increases their wellbeing](#).

Action Speaks

We have the responsibility to support future generations by confronting misinformation, standing up for our values, and trusting in the leadership of youth who are the true experts in their own lives. Youth remind us every day that we must follow their lead and never back down to hate. **When a vulnerable community is targeted by dangerous and misleading lies, we have a shared responsibility to respond and assure them their rights, dignity, and humanity are never up for debate.**

Today and always, Outright Vermont is here to build hope, equity, and power alongside LGBTQ+ youth - and we have been heartened by the flood of messages from youth, parents, educators, and community members across the state expressing their concern and looking for ways to show their support.

Here are some ways you can take action today:

- Join the counter-event, An Official Celebration of Queer Joy & Support Centering Trans Youth! Your presence helps to overshadow hate and fear with LOVE for trans youth. Join us in-person on Tuesday, June 20th from 6-8 pm at Vergennes Union High School. Bring a mask and a lot of joy!



- School and District administrators: check your policies! Like other school districts in Vermont, you may have strong value statements showing your commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, but if you don't have these values reflected in policies, there may be a side door open left open to exploitation by those who want to stop the progress of inclusion and equity.
- Parents and caregivers: this event is sponsored by a parents' group with national backing. A supportive parents and caregivers group in your district could offer a powerful counterpoint! Reach out to Outright for support in organizing with other parents.
- [Sign this open letter](#) to the Addison Northwest School District Superintendent urging them to rescind their authorization for the "Parents Rights in Education" group to meet on school property. Though the district is bound by the limitations of their present policy, this petition shows broad support for updated policy that would better protect the school and community in the future.

Here are some of the steps Outright has taken to support the youth and community members impacted by this harmful event:

- We have met with youth in Vergennes as they plan to engage in dialogue with administrative leaders, and share impacts of this happening at their school.
- We are taking the community's lead and supporting youth and adult stakeholders in the district as they plan a unified, organized response.
- Outright staff visited Vergennes Union HS this morning to facilitate dialogue between youth and administrators, making space for adults to hear about the repercussions of the policies that allow this group to infiltrate the school, and to foster understanding and support for impacted students.
- We are continuing to do what we always do: creating environments where youth are celebrated and embraced exactly as they are, and helping youth rally the strength to survive and become their best selves by finding their people.

In these moments, we are reminded how much work remains to ensure that LGBTQ+ youth have hope, equity, and power. And yet, those who seek to cause harm are inadvertently creating opportunities for all of us to demonstrate our solidarity with queer and trans youth everywhere. Thank you for being in it with youth. We need all of us!