

May 3, 2022

Vermont Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

Testimony in support of joint resolution: Transgender youth medical care in Vermont

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Member: Vermont Chapter – American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Vermont Medical Society (VMS)

Good morning Chairperson Lyons, Vice Chair Hardy, and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare. I am grateful to all of you for the opportunity to be here today to show my support for the joint resolution put forth by Senator Balint and Representative Small to “support transgender youth and their parents who seek essential medical care for the treatment of gender dysphoria.”

My name is Dr. Erica Gibson and I am a pediatrician with a specialty in adolescent medicine. I currently serve as the Division Chief of Adolescent Medicine at the University of Vermont Children's Hospital where we run the only multidisciplinary Transgender Youth Program in the state of Vermont.

Today I am speaking not only as a physician who provides direct care to transgender youth and their families but also as an official representative of the University of Vermont Health Network, the University of Vermont Children's Hospital, a the Executive Board of the Vermont Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Vermont Medical Society.

As expressed in the comprehensive memo released by the Vermont Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and signed by the leaders of multiple other state medical organizations in April of 2021, we support the recommendation that “youth who identify as transgender have access to comprehensive gender-affirming, and developmentally appropriate health care, that is provided in a safe and inclusive clinical space.” (AAP) We know from research and experience in our own program that adolescents who identify as transgender have high rates of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self harm, and suicide. Increasing evidence proves that the provision of thoughtful, comprehensive, and collaborative care for transgender youth and families results in improved mental and physical health outcomes. A skilled gender care team knows that every transition is different and there is no single prescribed approach to care; they work with a young person and their family to provide support, education and options in order to help them address their individual needs. By passing this resolution you will be taking an important step towards assuring that transgender youth and families in Vermont feel safe and will have ongoing access to life saving support and treatment.

Thank you for your commitment to protecting transgender youth and their families here in our state. On behalf of our patients and families, and the multiple professional medical organizations that I represent here today, I respectfully ask the Vermont Senate to pass this resolution.

CLARIFICATIONS OF DEFINITIONS REQUESTED AFTER TESTIMONY:

GENDER DYSPHORIA: A discomfort or distress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person's gender identity and their sex assigned at birth, including their physical sex characteristics and the associated gender role. Gender dysphoria ranges from manageable to debilitating, causing problems with social interactions and school performance. Symptoms include anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidality. SOURCE: [Supporting and Caring for Transgender Children](#) (page 7)

GENDER AFFIRMATIVE CARE MODEL: In a gender-affirmative care model pediatric providers offer developmentally appropriate care that is oriented toward understanding and appreciating the youth's gender experience. A strong nonjudgmental partnership with youth and their families can facilitate exploration of complicated emotions and gender-diverse expressions while allowing questions and concerns to be raised in a supportive environment. SOURCE: [American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement: Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender Diverse Children and Adolescents](#). (page 4)

YALE CHILD STUDY CENTER NEW RESOURCE APRIL 2022: [Yale Child Study Center Executive Summary: Biased Science - The Texas and Alabama Measures Criminalizing Medical Treatment for Transgender Children and Adolescents Rely on Inaccurate and Misleading Scientific Claims](#);

[Yale Child Study Center Full Report](#)

APRIL 2021 VERMONT MEMO: See next page

Vermont Chapter

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American Academy of Pediatrics

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University of Vermont
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FAMILY PHYSICIANS

April 15, 2021

The American Academy of Pediatrics Vermont Chapter and University of Vermont Children's Hospital, joined by the Vermont Medical Society, Vermont Academy of Family Physicians, Vermont Psychiatric Association, Vermont American Academy of Emergency Physicians and the Physician Assistant Academy of Vermont denounce the large number of legislative proposals throughout the nation that will harm transgender and gender diverse youth. Every individual is entitled to high quality evidence-based medical care regardless of gender or sexual orientation. These proposals drive discrimination, reinforce stigma and create barriers to care.

We are thankful to provide care in a state that has routinely recognized the rights of young people, the rights of LGBTQ identified persons and the autonomy of medical providers, but we know we are not immune to attacks on access to care for transgender and gender diverse Vermonters. We call on Governor Scott and the Vermont General Assembly to support full access to gender care and oppose any proposals that would:

- Limit access to evidence-based medical and psychological care
- Prevent youth from playing sports alongside their peers.

"The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that youth who identify as transgender have access to comprehensive, gender-affirming, and developmentally appropriate health care that is provided in a safe and inclusive clinical space. We also recommend that playing on sports teams helps youth develop self-esteem, correlates positively with overall mental health, and appears to have a protective effect against suicide." ([AAP Speaks Out Against Bills Harming Transgender Youth](#))

Every major medical association in the United States recognizes the medical necessity of transition-related care for improving the physical and mental health of transgender people. We stand with our national colleagues in the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the National Education Association, and numerous other major health, education and child welfare organizations that signed on to a [statement](#) drafted by the Human Rights Campaign opposing these bills.


Transgender youth face many obstacles and barriers to their mental health and well-being. A statement published by the American Medical Association states, "Transgender minors also face a significantly heightened risk of suicide. But research has demonstrated that improved body satisfaction and self-esteem following the receipt of gender-affirming care is protective against poorer mental health and supports healthy relationships with parents and peers. Studies also demonstrate dramatic reductions in suicide attempts, as well as decreased rates of depression and anxiety."

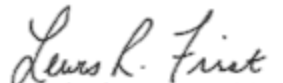
A Vermont parent of a transgender youth speaks with intimate experience - "Being 13 is difficult enough, you don't feel comfortable in your own skin either physically or metaphorically. Gender affirming care means that my son sees his health care providers as allies and valuable resources. It means that he is empowered to feel comfortable taking good care of the body he has while looking forward joyfully to the body he wants; knowing that his health care providers are fully invested in helping him get there. It means that he has the space and resources to attend to his mental health with absolutely no shame. It means that his family does not live in fear that our beloved boy will become part of the statistics of trans kids who attempt suicide. Gender affirming health care is a human right. Everyone deserves to walk through this world comfortable in their own skin."


As physicians and health care leaders in Vermont, we believe that medical decisions belong to transgender and gender diverse youth, their parents and their health care practitioners. We oppose any efforts for legislative interference in this decision making, and we call on legislators across the country to reject these harmful measures.


We vow to continue to support gender diverse young people, their families, their communities and their care teams and invite others to join us in this commitment.


Sincerely,

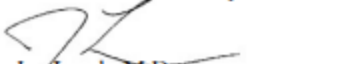

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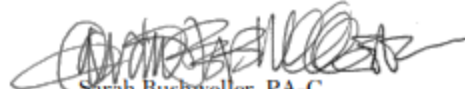

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If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide, there is help available.

- Trevor Project: 866-488-7386
- Trans Life Line: 877-565-8860
- [Vermont Crisis Text Line](#): 741741
- [Vermont Crisis Lines](#)

Other Resources:

- [Legislative Tracker: Anti-Transgender Medical Care Bans](#)
- [Legislative Tracker: Anti-Transgender Student Athletics](#)
- [AAP: Ensuring Comprehensive Care Support for Transgender and Gender Diverse Children and Adolescents](#)
- [AAP Healthy Children: Support Resources for Families of Gender Diverse Youth](#)
- [UVM Children's Hospital: Timna's Story - Raising a transgender child](#)
- [UVM Children's Hospital Transgender Resources](#)
- [Outright Vermont](#)