



For Young LGBTQ Lives

April 10, 2024

Via email to HouseEducation@rilegislature.gov

RE: H 7781 (“Parents Bill of Rights”) and H 7727 (“Fairness in Women’s Sports Act”)

Dear Members of the House Committee on Education,

The Trevor Project writes **in opposition to H 7781 and H 7727** due to the harm the outlined measures will have on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) young people in Rhode Island. If enacted, H 7781 would impose concerning censorship measures as well as potentially “out” LGBTQ+ young people to their parents and caregivers, while H 7727 would impose a discriminatory ban on transgender young people playing with their friends on sports teams that best align with their gender identity. Schools and sports play a critical role in creating positive and affirming environments for LGBTQ+ young people, and it’s essential that educators, school staff, and coaches are able to provide them the full support they need to be successful.

The Trevor Project is the world’s leading suicide prevention and mental health organization for LGBTQ+ young people. We offer a suite of 24/7 crisis intervention and suicide prevention programs, including TrevorLifeline, TrevorText, and TrevorChat as well as the world’s largest safe space social networking site for LGBTQ young people, TrevorSpace.

LGBTQ+ young people are not inherently prone to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Rather, they are placed at higher risk by the mistreatment and stigmatization they experience in society. According to The Trevor Project’s [2023 National Survey on LGBTQ young people Mental Health](#), 41% of LGBTQ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary young people. **In Rhode Island, 42% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered suicide and 17% attempted suicide in 2022.** However, LGBTQ+ young people who had access to spaces that affirmed their sexual

orientation and gender identity – including schools – reported lower rates of attempting suicide than those who did not.

If enacted, H 7781 and H 7727 would contribute to the adverse mental health outcomes, such as anxiety and depression, that increase the risk of suicidality among LGBTQ+ students. Rather than advance parental rights, H 7781 aims to censor inclusive and affirming school curriculum and policies and actively harms LGBTQ+ young people. All young people should receive an education that encourages curiosity and critical thinking through a broad range of school subjects. **When politicians pass laws that say being LGBTQ+ is so shameful schools can't even discuss it without parental consent, the emotional harm can be devastating as LGBTQ+ young people learn to accept and love who they are.** Further, this bill sets a dangerous precedent that undermines the diverse perspectives of parents in a school's community.

H 7727 would exclude transgender young people from important leadership, sportsmanship, and relationship-building opportunities that are central to positive youth development. At The Trevor Project, we constantly hear from transgender youth in crisis who want nothing more than to be recognized for who they are. **Our research has found that LGBTQ+ youth who participated in sports reported nearly 20% lower rates of depressive symptoms compared to those who did not.**

Shutting transgender young people out of these experiences further promotes discrimination and encourages harassment of vulnerable young people in Rhode Island, increasing the kind of social isolation and stigma that contributes to self-harm and suicide risk.

Despite what proponents of these harmful policies say, these efforts do not make school safer or better for any student. Instead, they stop LGBTQ+ students from being able to bring their full selves to school, and prevent school staff and allies from providing them with the support they need. They also keep LGBTQ+ students from being able to learn and focus on their education.

In contrast, safe and affirming school environments improve LGBTQ+ youth mental health. LGBTQ+ young people who report having at least one accepting adult are 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt. Further, LGBTQ+ young people in schools with an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum, and by extension, school policies, were more likely to report that their peers were somewhat or very accepting of LGBTQ+ people and less likely to experience harassment or feeling unsafe. Transgender and nonbinary young people also reported lower rates of attempting suicide when they had access to spaces (online, school, and home) that affirm their gender identity. Inclusive school environments for LGBTQ young people also play an important role in their academic achievement, which can impact the trajectory of their continuing education and career.

Finally, as members of the House Committee on Education, you have the opportunity to model inclusive and affirming behavior by rejecting these cruel and discriminatory bills. **This is especially important given that in Rhode Island, 90% of LGBTQ+ youth surveyed in 2022 reported that recent politics negatively impacted their wellbeing either sometimes or a lot.**¹ Opposition to inclusive school practices is part of a broader movement to not only oppose LGBTQ-inclusive school policies but also to erase LGBTQ+ identities from public discourse. It's crucial that we continue to foster inclusive and affirming spaces and dialogue not only within our schools but also within Rhode Island.

LGBTQ+ young people should be able to thrive in schools that are supportive and affirming of all students. For these reasons, The Trevor Project urges the House Committee on Education to reject H 7781 and H 7727. Should you have any questions or if we can be of assistance regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me at Janson.Wu@TheTrevorProject.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Wu', is displayed on a light gray rectangular background.

Janson Wu

Sr. Director of State Advocacy and Government Affairs

¹ 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>