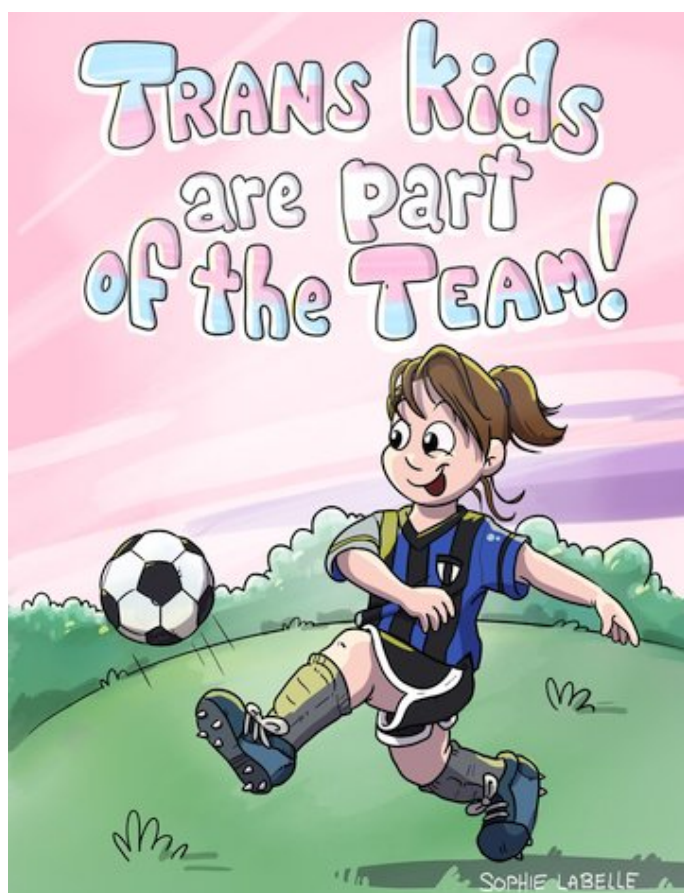


Defending trans youth is a struggle for all workers

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Graphic by Sophie Labelle
(SeriousTransVibes.com)

In tandem with racist attacks on Black voting rights like SB 202 in Georgia, the ultra-right is waging war on transgender youth in state legislatures across the country. Specifically, numerous bills have been introduced to deny young people's rights to gender-affirming health care and to participate in public school sports programs.

Like the attacks on voting rights, these measures target some of the most vulnerable members of our working class, and with the same goal: to divide and conquer.

At least 174 anti-LGBTQ2S bills are currently under consideration in state legislatures. "Of those, 95 directly target transgender people, and about half of those would bar transgender girls from participating in sports consistent with their gender identity. Many of the other anti-trans bills seek to ban gender-affirming care for minors," [the Advocate reports](#).

On April 6, Arkansas became the first state in the country to [ban gender-affirming health care](#) for trans youth after the state legislature overrode Gov. Asa Hutchinson's veto. But Hutchinson is no friend of trans people; just days before, on March 26, [he signed a law](#) banning trans youth from sports teams, paving the way for the anti-health-care measure.

Mississippi banned trans youth from sports on March 11. Tennessee then enacted an [anti-trans sports law](#), while South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem — a notorious COVID denialist who has especially waged war on Indigenous peoples' health during the pandemic — [signed two executive orders](#) banning trans people from participating in public school and college sports programs.

The right-wing hopes to exploit backward ideas and prejudices about trans people to

throw a wrench into the class struggle. The whole capitalist ruling class was panicked by the Black Lives Matter uprising following the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor last year. Black, white, Latinx, Asian, Arab and Indigneous people united in the streets in defense of Black lives and against officially sanctioned white supremacist terrorism.

Now more than ever, sowing division is the top priority of the bosses and their political agents.

Build unity, defend the most oppressed

The job of all class-conscious workers, progressives, socialists and communists, on the other hand, is to counter the bosses' divide-and-conquer plans by building unity.

And unity starts with defending the most oppressed members of our class: Black people whose lives and voting rights are on the chopping block; prisoners and migrants in COVID-ridden cages; Asian communities facing violence; and trans youth who are being demeaned and scapegoated.

Just look at who is promoting the wave of anti-trans legislation. It's the same politicians and anti-people forces that want to ban the right to protest for Black lives, who deny the need for public health measures against COVID-19, and supported Donald Trump's attempt to overturn the 2020 election results.

They are being aided by opportunist Republicans who opposed Trump's coup attempt but are now desperate to get back in the ultra-right's good graces before the next election cycle. And they are further helped by mainstream centrist and liberal Democratic politicians who give lip service to trans rights while trying to exploit the crisis for their own electoral gain.

Denying health care kills

Trans people have had to fight tooth and nail to have their identities acknowledged and to be treated respectfully by health-care institutions. Taking away the right of young trans people to be treated with respect, and to have the agency to seek hormone therapy, choose sex-reassignment and other affirming care, is a life and death matter.

According to a 2020 [study by the University of Pittsburgh](#), about 85% of trans adolescents reported “seriously considering suicide,” and over half had attempted suicide. A 2019 study by an crisis-prevention group found 1 in 3 transgender youth [reported attempting suicide](#).

Institutionalized prejudice not only hurts — it kills.

Before the COVID pandemic, the U.S. was already awash in an epidemic of violent attacks and murders of trans people. Young trans women of color are the most frequent targets.

Thirteen murders of trans people have already been [reported in 2021](#). Last year saw 44 murders of trans people, the highest number recorded since the Human Rights Campaign began tracking them in 2013. The true numbers are likely much higher, since police and media often misgender victims.

Efforts to deny trans youth the right to affirm their identities through participation in sports programs fuels these acts of bigoted violence, just as Trump’s and Biden’s anti-China rhetoric fuels anti-Asian violence.

‘An attack on the humanity of trans people’

Champion soccer player Megan Rapinoe is known for her commitment to solidarity. An out lesbian, Rapinoe supported Colin Kaepernick’s crusade for Black lives in professional sports and other anti-racist causes.

Rapinoe wrote a powerful op-ed in the March 28 Washington Post, [“Bills to ban transgender kids from sports try to solve a problem that doesn’t exist”](#):

“You may not know that a person in your life is trans — you may not be aware of the fullest self within your co-worker, friend, relative or even the child playing in your living room. Trans people contribute meaningfully to our society: our schools, neighborhoods, communities and families. Trans people deserve dignity, respect and opportunity. These bills are an attack on the humanity and belonging of trans people, and that’s why this issue is important to me as a member of the LGBTQ community.

“For some, discrimination is the point. But we can celebrate all girls and women in sports while ensuring trans people aren’t discriminated against. That is why all women must stand up and demand that exclusion is not done in our name.

“The value of participating in sports is well-documented. Transgender kids deserve the same chances to enjoy sports; to gain confidence, self-respect and leadership skills; and to learn what it means to be part of a team. When we tell transgender girls that they can’t play girls’ sports — or transgender boys that they can’t play boys’ sports — they miss out on these important experiences and opportunities. And we lose the right to say we care about children.”

Numerous [legal challenges are being prepared](#) to fight the anti-trans state legislation. That’s important and necessary, but it’s not enough. Workers’ and community organizations need to take up the struggle, and take it to the streets.

Take it to the streets!

When the COVID health emergency subsides, the working class and its organizations need to take up the urgent need for a massive civil-rights mobilization like those that pushed forward lesbian, gay and bisexual rights in the 1980s and 1990s. These

militant, proud manifestations helped to educate the whole working class and created a sea-change in support for gay rights.

Revolutionary socialist Leslie Feinberg, who used Marxism to understand the basis of transgender oppression, suffered serious and ultimately fatal health problems in part due to the lack of respectful and gender-affirming health care.

In the pamphlet “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come,” Feinberg wrote:

“The institutionalized bigotry and oppression we face today have not always existed. They arose with the division of society into exploiter and exploited. Divide-and-conquer tactics have allowed the slave-owners, feudal landlords and corporate ruling classes to keep for themselves the lion’s share of wealth created by the laboring class.

“Like racism and all forms of prejudice, bigotry toward transgendered people is a deadly carcinogen. We are pitted against each other in order to keep us from seeing each other as allies.

“Genuine bonds of solidarity can be forged between people who respect each other’s differences and are willing to fight their enemy together. We are the class that does the work of the world, and can revolutionize it. We can win true liberation.”

In the spirit of Leslie Feinberg, we say: Defending trans youth is a fight for the whole working class!

