

# LGBTQIA+ YOUTH RIGHTS AND ISSUES

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I.	INTRODUCTION . . . . .	694
II.	CHALLENGES IN SCHOOLS . . . . .	695
A.	OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL AND STATE PROTECTIONS . . . . .	695
1.	Federal Constitutional Law . . . . .	696
a.	<i>Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection</i> . . . . .	696
i.	Gender Identity . . . . .	696
ii.	Liability . . . . .	698
b.	<i>First Amendment Retaliation</i> . . . . .	700
2.	Federal Statutory Law: Title IX . . . . .	701
a.	<i>Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students</i> . . . . .	702
b.	<i>Transgender Students</i> . . . . .	703
c.	<i>Liability</i> . . . . .	704
3.	State Law . . . . .	705
B.	TRANSITIONING IN SCHOOLS . . . . .	708
1.	Required Documentation of Transition . . . . .	709
2.	Schools' Duties . . . . .	710
a.	<i>Names and Pronouns</i> . . . . .	710
b.	<i>Access to Sex-Segregated Spaces</i> . . . . .	711
c.	<i>Participation in Sports</i> . . . . .	715
C.	SEX EDUCATION . . . . .	719
D.	FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION . . . . .	723
1.	Student Organizations . . . . .	723
2.	Students' Apparel and Appearance . . . . .	724
3.	Access to Information on the Internet . . . . .	725
4.	Faculty and Staff . . . . .	727
E.	BULLYING, HARASSMENT, AND VIOLENCE . . . . .	728
1.	Bullying and Harassment . . . . .	728
2.	Suicides and Murders . . . . .	730
F.	STUDENT PRIVACY AND LEGAL RECOURSE FOR "OUTING" BY SCHOOL OFFICIALS . . . . .	732
III.	CHALLENGES FACING FAMILIES OF LGBTQIA+ YOUTH . . . . .	733
A.	CONVERSION THERAPY . . . . .	733
1.	Consumer Fraud . . . . .	734
2.	Bans Based on Psychological Harm to Minors . . . . .	736
B.	CHILD CUSTODY ISSUES FOR LGBTQIA+-AFFIRMING PARENTS . . . . .	738
C.	HOMELESSNESS AMONG LGBTQIA+ YOUTH AND RELATED ISSUES . . . . .	739
1.	Primary Causes . . . . .	740
2.	LGBTQIA+ Youth-Specific Difficulties . . . . .	740

3.	Proposed Legal Solutions . . . . .	742
a.	<i>Child Support and Emancipation</i> . . . . .	742
b.	<i>Foster Care Reform</i> . . . . .	742
c.	<i>Prevention of Discrimination in Emergency Shelters and Permanent Housing</i> . . . . .	743
d.	<i>Access to Medical Treatment</i> . . . . .	745
i.	Hormone Replacement Therapy and Gender Affirmation Surgeries. . . . .	746
IV.	CHALLENGES FACING LGBTQIA+ YOUTH IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM . . . . .	747
A.	THE PREVALENCE OF LGBTQIA+ YOUTH . . . . .	747
B.	HARASSMENT AND ABUSE OF LGBTQIA+ YOUTH . . . . .	747
C.	PROBLEMS SPECIFIC TO TRANSGENDER YOUTH . . . . .	748
1.	Placement . . . . .	748
2.	Access to Medical Care . . . . .	749
D.	HOW COURTS RESOLVE ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE . . . . .	750
V.	CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS PERTAINING TO LGBTQIA+ YOUTH. . . . .	751
A.	THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT AND THE STUDENT NON-DISCRIMINATION ACT . . . . .	751
B.	THE EQUALITY ACT. . . . .	751
C.	THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES REGULATIONS IMPLEMENTING SECTION 1557 OF THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT. . . . .	752
D.	TRANSGENDER ACCESS TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND RESTROOMS. . . . .	753
VI.	CONCLUSION . . . . .	754

## I. INTRODUCTION

This Article discusses the myriad challenges lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning<sup>1</sup> (LGBTQIA+) youth face in the United States (U.S.). The Article focuses on issues LGBTQIA+ (the “plus” holds space for other sexual identities not represented within the acronym) youth confront in school as well as the issues faced by families with LGBTQIA+ children, including increased risk of violence, abuse, housing instability, and inadequate access to appropriate medical care. The Article also examines and summarizes legal protections for LGBTQIA+ youth at the federal and state levels.

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1. In this Article, the term “transgender” youth, unless otherwise stated, refers to youth who do not identify with the sex or gender assigned to them at birth, including those who have already begun transitioning, those who have already transitioned and now identify as a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth, and those who may view themselves, and/or may be viewed by others, as not conforming to traditional gender norms for the gender they were assigned at birth. For a history of transgender identity in society, see Blaise Vanderhorst, *Whither Lies the Self: Intersex and Transgender Individuals and a Proposal for Brain-Based Legal Sex*, 9 HARV. L. & POL’Y REV. 241, 246–55 (2015). Cisgender is the adjective this Article will use to denote someone whose sense of identity corresponds with the sex assigned to them at birth. See *Cisgender*, OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, <https://perma.cc/ZJ5J-6HYH>.

## II. CHALLENGES IN SCHOOLS

### A. OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL AND STATE PROTECTIONS

Since the turn of the twentieth century, public education has grown in importance across the U.S. Today, every state constitution contains an education provision.<sup>2</sup>

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2. ALA. CONST. art. XIV, § 256 (West, Westlaw through amendments ratified through Nov. 26, 2024); ALASKA CONST. art. VII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through amendments in 2024); ARIZ. CONST. art. XI, § 1 (West, Westlaw through legis. of the 2024 2d Reg. Sess. of the 56th Leg.); ARK. CONST. art. XIV, § 1 (West, Westlaw through the 2025 Reg. Sess. of the 95th Arkansas Gen. Assemb.); CAL. CONST. art. IX, § 1 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 1 of 2023-2024 2d Ex. Sess.); COLO. CONST. art. IX, § 2 (West, Westlaw through amendments adopted through the Nov. 5, 2024 election); CONN. CONST. art. VIII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through enactments of the 2024 Reg. Sess. and 2024 June Spec. Sess.); DEL. CONST. art. X, § 1 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 3 of the 153d Gen. Assemb. (2025-2026)); FLA. CONST. art. IX, § 1 (amended 1998) (West, Westlaw through 2020 Gen. Election); GA. CONST. art. VIII, § 1, ¶ 1 (West, Westlaw through Act 1 of the 2025 Reg. Sess. of the Georgia Gen. Assem.); HAW. CONST. art. X, § 1 (West, Westlaw through the end of the 2024 Reg. and 1st Spec. Sess.); IDAHO CONST. art. IX, § 1 (West, Westlaw through the 1st Reg. Sess. of the 68th Idaho Leg., which convened on Monday, Jan. 6, 2025); ILL. CONST. art. X, § 1 (West, Westlaw through Oct. 1, 2024); IND. CONST. art. VIII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through all legis. of the 2024 2d Reg. Sess. of the 123d Gen. Assemb. effective through July 1, 2024); IOWA CONST. art. IX (West, Westlaw through legis. effective 11/5/2024 from the 2024 Reg. Sess.); KAN. CONST. art. VI, § 1 (West, Westlaw through laws enacted during the 2024 Reg. and 1st Spec. Sess. of the Kansas Leg. effective on or before Jan. 1, 2025); KY. CONST. § 183 (West, Westlaw through laws effective Feb. 25, 2025 and the Nov. 5, 2024 election); LA. CONST. art. VIII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through amendments approved Jan. 1, 2025); ME. CONST. art. VIII, part 1, § 1 (Westlaw through 2023 2d Reg. Sess. of the 131st Leg.); MD. CONST. art. VIII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through legis. effective through July 1, 2024, from the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Gen. Assemb.); MASS. CONST. pt. 2, Ch. V, § 2 (West, Westlaw through amendments approved Feb. 1, 2024); MICH. CONST. Ch. 1, art. VIII, § 2 (West, Westlaw through amendments approved Nov. 8, 2022); MINN. CONST. art. XIII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through all legis. from the 2024 Reg. Sess.); MISS. CONST. art. VIII, § 201 (West, Westlaw through the 2024 Reg., 1st, and 2d Extraordinary Sess. effective through July 1, 2024); MO. CONST. art. IX, § 1 (West, Westlaw through the end of the 2024 2d Reg. Sess. of the 102d Gen. Assemb.); MONT. CONST. art. X, § 1 (West, Westlaw through the Nov. 2024 Gen. Election); NEB. CONST. art. VII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through leg. effective Feb. 26, 2025, of the 1st Reg. Sess. of the 109th Legis. (2025)); NEV. CONST. art. XI, § 2 (West, Westlaw through leg. of the 83d Reg. Sess. (2025) effective through Feb. 13, 2025; N.H. CONST. pt. 2, art. 83 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 1 of the 2025 Reg. Sess.); N.J. CONST. art. VIII, § 4, ¶ 1 (West, Westlaw through amendments approved at Nov. 3, 2020 election); N.M. CONST. art. XII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through amendments approved Nov. 3, 2020); N.Y. CONST. art. XI, § 1 (McKinney, Westlaw through L.2025, Chs. 1 to 49, 61 to 100; N.C. CONST. art. IX, § 2 (West, Westlaw through the end of the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Gen. Assemb.); N.D. CONST. art. VIII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through results of the Nov. 3, 2020 Gen. Election); OHIO CONST. art. VI, § 3 (West, Westlaw through all laws of the 135th Gen. Assemb. (2023-2024)); OKLA. CONST. art. XIII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through amendments approved Nov. 2, 2024); OR. CONST. art. VIII, § 3 (West, Westlaw through laws of the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the 82d Legis. Assemb.); PA. CONST. art. III, § 14 (West, Westlaw through Nov. 7, 2023 Gen. Election); R.I. CONST. art. XII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 457 of the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the R.I. Leg.); S.C. CONST. art. XI, § 3 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Act No. 225); S.D. CONST. art. VIII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Sess. of the Gen. Assemb.); TENN. CONST. art. XI, § 12 (West, Westlaw through 2022 2d Reg. Sess. of the 112th Tenn. Gen. Assemb.); TEX. CONST. art. VII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through the end of the 2023 Reg., 2d, 3d and 4th Called Sessions of the 88th Legis.); UTAH CONST. art. X, § 1 (West, Westlaw through the 2024 4th Spec. Sess.); VT. CONST. § 68 (West, Westlaw through the 2024 Gen. Election); VA. CONST. art. VIII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through the 2024 Reg. Sess. and 2024 Spec. Sess. I); WASH. CONST. art. IX, § 1 (West, Westlaw through Nov. 5, 2024, Gen. Election); W. VA. CONST. art. XII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through legis. of the 2024 Reg. Sess. approved through Feb. 26,

LGBTQIA+ students face several challenges that may prevent them from attaining equal access to the benefits of public education compared to non-LGBTQIA+ students. Administrators, teachers, and peers may play a role in the harassment or bullying of LGBTQIA+ students,<sup>3</sup> and transgender students are routinely denied access to gender-corresponding sex-segregated facilities, and educational and athletic programs.<sup>4</sup>

While there is no federal law explicitly protecting K-12 public school students from discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, the Biden Administration previously interpreted Title IX's prohibition against sex-based discrimination to extend to sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>5</sup> However, the Trump Administration rescinded these interpretations and declared that Title IX protections only apply on the basis of sex, which is limited to "biological sex."<sup>6</sup> This interpretation follows the Trump Administration's Executive Order, issued in January 2025, that banned the federal government from recognizing "gender ideology."<sup>7</sup> In addition to the inconsistent approaches by the Executive Branch, students and their parents must also navigate a patchwork of federal and state laws when they seek to hold their schools accountable for such discrimination.<sup>8</sup> This section summarizes the various laws that provide students with some protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. This section discusses, in respective order, how (1) federal constitutional law, (2) federal statutory law, and (3) state law apply to some of the more common challenges facing LGBTQIA+ students at school.

## 1. Federal Constitutional Law

### *a. Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection.*

i. **Gender Identity.** Although the Supreme Court has not identified transgender persons as members of a suspect class, a consensus is emerging that disparate

2025); WIS. CONST. art. X, § 3 (West, Westlaw through amendments received Dec. 3, 2024); WYO. CONST. art. VII, § 1 (West, Westlaw through the 2024 Budget Sess. of the Wyo. Legis.).

3. See *infra* Section II.E.

4. See *infra* Section II.B.2.

5. See Pamela S. Karlan, *Application of Bostock v. Clayton County to Title IX of the Education*, U.S. DEP'T OF JUST., CIV. RTS. DIV. (2021), <https://perma.cc/NT6D-SHXG>; see also Exec. Order No. 13,988, 86 Fed. Reg. 7,023 (Jan. 20, 2021); see also Enforcement of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 with Respect to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Light of Bostock v. Clayton County, 86 Fed. Reg. 32637, 32637–40 (June 22, 2021).

6. See Craig Trainor, *Dear Colleague Letter*, U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., OFF. FOR CIV. RTS. (Feb. 4, 2025), <https://perma.cc/W37N-C6AG>; see also Press Release, U.S. Dep't of Just., U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice Announce Title IX Special Investigations Team (Apr. 4, 2025), <https://perma.cc/5NGG-MSKC> (describing that the departments will "ensure timely, consistent resolutions to protect students, and especially female athletes, from the pernicious effects of gender ideology in school programs and activities").

7. Exec. Order No. 14,168, 90 C.F.R. § 8615 (Jan. 30, 2025) (eliminating the use of "gender identity" by the federal government and ordering the sole use of "male" or "female" to categorize individuals).

8. See *infra* Part II.A.1–3.

or discriminatory treatment based on a person's status as a transgender individual may constitute a denial of equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>9</sup> Various federal courts have weighed in on this issue,<sup>10</sup> but circuits are split as to whether these equal protection claims warrant rational basis review<sup>11</sup> or intermediate scrutiny.<sup>12</sup> Rational basis review merely requires that there be a rational connection between the classification and a legitimate state interest.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, intermediate scrutiny requires that a statutory classification be substantially related to an important government objective.<sup>14</sup> This level of scrutiny may continue to be extended in equal protection cases following the Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock*, which held that discrimination based on sex necessarily includes discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and is thus subject to intermediate scrutiny.<sup>15</sup>

One of the earliest Supreme Court cases to consider discrimination based on an individual's sex or gender presentation was *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins*.<sup>16</sup> In *Price Waterhouse*, an employer denied a woman a promotion because she did not act "feminine" enough.<sup>17</sup> The woman sued for sex discrimination under Title VII, and the Supreme Court upheld her claim by ruling that employers cannot discriminate against employees based on sex stereotypes.<sup>18</sup> Subsequently, in applying *Price Waterhouse*, many courts have found that discrimination against transgender individuals is unlawful under the Equal Protection Clause because it also discriminates based on sex stereotypes.<sup>19</sup> For example, in *Glenn v. Brumby*,<sup>20</sup> the Eleventh Circuit held that discrimination against an individual on the basis of gender nonconformity constitutes sex-based discrimination in violation of the

9. See James Lockhart, Annotation, *Discrimination on Basis of Person's Transgender or Transsexual Status as Violation of Federal Law*, 84 A.L.R. FED. 2d 1, § 4 (2014); see also *M.A.B. v. Bd. of Ed. of Talbot Cnty.*, 286 F. Supp. 3d 704, 718–19 (D. Md. 2018); *Hecox v. Little*, 79 F.4th 1009, 1021–22 (9th Cir. 2023).

10. See *Grimm v. Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd.*, 972 F.3d 586, 608 (4th Cir. 2020); *Hecox*, 79 F.4th at 1021–22; *Brandt v. Rutledge*, 47 F.4th 661, 669–70 (8th Cir. 2022); *Adams v. Sch. Bd. of St. Johns Cnty., Fla.*, 3 F.4th 1299, 1307 (11th Cir. 2021).

11. See *L.W. ex rel. Williams v. Skrmetti*, 83 F.4th 460, 486 (6th Cir. 2023); *Eknes-Tucker v. Governor of Ala.*, 80 F.4th 1205, 1227–28 (11th Cir. 2023); *Poe v. Drummond*, 697 F. Supp. 3d 1238, 1253 (N.D. Okla. 2023).

12. See *Doe v. Horne*, 683 F. Supp. 3d 950, 971 (D. Ariz. 2023); *Doe v. Snyder*, 28 F.4th 103, 113 (9th Cir. 2022); *Williams v. Kincaid*, 45 F.4th 759, 772 (4th Cir. 2022); *Brandt*, 47 F.4th at 670.

13. See *Heller v. Doe*, 509 U.S. 312, 320 (1993) (finding a law does not "run afoul of the Equal Protection Clause if there is a rational relationship between the disparity of treatment and some legitimate governmental purpose.>").

14. See, e.g., *Craig v. Boren*, 429 U.S. 190, 197 (1976).

15. *Bostock v. Clayton Cnty.*, 590 U.S. 644 (2020); see also Sharita Gruberg, *Beyond Bostock: The Future of LGBTQ Civil Rights*, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS (Aug. 26, 2020), <https://perma.cc/B6JN-TMCA>.

16. *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins*, 490 U.S. 228, 235 (1989).

17. *Id.*

18. *Id.* at 250–52.

19. See Lockhart, *supra* note 9, § 4. For a similar application of *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins* in a Title VII case, see *Fabian v. Hosp. of Cent. Conn.*, 172 F. Supp. 3d 509 (D. Conn. 2016).

20. *Glenn v. Brumby*, 663 F.3d 1312 (11th Cir. 2011).

Equal Protection Clause.<sup>21</sup> Thus, a transgender state employee who was fired because her supervisor considered it “inappropriate” for her to appear at work dressed as a woman could bring an action for relief pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.<sup>22</sup>

ii. Liability. Both individual school employees and school districts may be held accountable for sex-based discrimination under the Equal Protection Clause.<sup>23</sup> However, school officials cannot be held liable under a theory of *respondeat superior*.<sup>24</sup>

(1) School District Equal Protection Liability. To prove that a school is liable, a plaintiff must demonstrate that the school discriminated based on a district policy or long-standing custom.<sup>25</sup> The custom can either derive from an explicit policy or be so common and enforced that it rises to the level of a policy.<sup>26</sup>

Plaintiffs have been particularly successful at proving school district liability where the district failed to respond to complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity with the same vigor with which it responded to complaints of other sorts of discrimination.<sup>27</sup> For example, in *Montgomery v. Independent School Dist. No. 709*,<sup>28</sup> the plaintiff adduced evidence that the school responded to all allegations of boy-against-girl sexual harassment by notifying the alleged harasser’s parents and threatening police involvement if the behavior continued.<sup>29</sup> However, when the plaintiff alleged harassment on the basis of his sexual orientation, the school did not notify the alleged harasser’s parents nor threaten police involvement if the harassment continued.<sup>30</sup>

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21. *Id.* at 1317.

22. *Id.* at 1315–16; *see also* 42 U.S.C. § 1983 (1996) (“Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress . . .”).

23. *See* *Murrell v. Sch. Dist. No. 1, Denver*, 186 F.3d 1238, 1249–52 (10th Cir. 1999); *Doe v. Hutchinson*, 728 Fed. Appx. 829, 832 (10th Cir. 2018).

24. *See* *Walsh v. Tehachapi Unified Sch. Dist.*, 827 F. Supp. 2d 1107, 1116–17 (E.D. Cal. 2011) (holding that a school district superintendent was not liable for district employees’ acts under *respondeat superior* in § 1983 claim because § 1983 liability can only arise from an individual’s own actions). *See also* *Bostic v. Vasquez*, 652 F. Supp. 3d 971, 982 (N.D. Ind. 2023); *M.M. v. San Juan Unified Sch. Dist.*, No. 2:19-cv-00398-TLN-EFB, 2020 WL 5702265, at \*9 (S.D. Cal. Sept. 24, 2020); *Lilly v. Univ. of Cal. San Diego*, No.: 21-CV-1703 TWR, 2023 WL 5444776, at \*8 (S.D. Cal. Aug. 23, 2023).

25. *See* *Doe ex rel. Conner v. Unified Sch. Dist. 233*, No. 12-2285-JTM, 2013 WL 3984336, at \*8 (D. Kan. Aug. 1, 2023).

26. *Id.*

27. *See* *Montgomery v. Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 709*, 109 F. Supp. 2d 1081, 1097 (D. Minn. 2000); *see also* *S.E.S. ex rel. J.M.S. v. Galena Unified Sch. Dist. No. 499*, 446 F. Supp. 3d 743, 806 (D. Kan. 2020) (holding that since a rational trier of fact could find the school district knew that its earlier responses to the harassment were ineffective to deter the persistent harassment of the plaintiff, school districts were required to do more in light of the circumstances).

28. *Montgomery*, 109 F. Supp. 2d 1081.

29. *Id.* at 1097.

30. *Id.*

Conversely, in *Brown v. Ogletree*,<sup>31</sup> a case initiated by the estate of a student who died by suicide due to harassment regarding his sexual orientation, a school district's motion for summary judgment on Equal Protection claims was granted, even though the school ignored incidents of LGBTQIA+ bullying for over two years.<sup>32</sup> The court was unable to distinguish between the school's responses to this bullying and its responses to other instances of bullying and harassment.<sup>33</sup>

Plaintiffs have also been successful at proving school district liability where the district has failed to follow its own written anti-discrimination policies in response to discrimination based on sexual orientation.<sup>34</sup> The departure from district policies, in this context, is sufficient to establish discriminatory intent.<sup>35</sup>

(2) Individual Equal Protection Liability. In order to hold an individual school employee liable under the Equal Protection Clause, a plaintiff must prove that the employee was deliberately indifferent to known discrimination.<sup>36</sup> Mere negligence is insufficient.<sup>37</sup>

As with school district liability, the failure to respond with the same vigor to complaints of LGBTQIA+-based discrimination can be evidence of deliberate indifference.<sup>38</sup> A showing of failure to follow district policies can also prove liability on the school employee.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, a school district employee's discriminatory statements may provide additional evidence of deliberate indifference.<sup>40</sup> For example, in *Nabozny v. Podlesny*,<sup>41</sup> a high school student reported an assault based on his sexual orientation, and the school official in charge of discipline "laughed and told [him that he] deserved such treatment because he is gay."<sup>42</sup> The Seventh Circuit held that this statement rendered the school official's argument that he was not deliberately indifferent "simply indefensible."<sup>43</sup>

Finally, in order to hold an individual school employee liable in an equal protection claim under Section 1983, a plaintiff must overcome the employee's claim of qualified immunity.<sup>44</sup> Qualified immunity only applies if a defendant would not have known that "discrimination . . . based on . . . sexual orientation,

31. Estate of *Brown v. Ogletree*, No. 11-CV-1491, 2012 WL 591190, at \*1 (S.D. Tex. Feb. 21, 2012).

32. *Id.* at \*1-3, 21.

33. *Id.* at \*12; *see also Hoffman v. Saginaw Pub. Sch.*, No. 12-10354, 2012 WL 2450805, at \*12-13 (E.D. Mich. June 27, 2012) (finding the plaintiff failed to demonstrate the bullying was based on sex and dismissing the Title IX claim).

34. *See, e.g., Roe ex rel. Slagle v. Grossmont Union High Sch. Dist.*, 443 F. Supp. 3d 1162, 1169 (S. D. Cal. 2020); *Seiwert v. Spencer-Owen Cmty. Sch. Corp.*, 497 F. Supp. 2d 942, 952 (S.D. Ind. 2007).

35. *See Seiwert*, 497 F. Supp. 2d at 952.

36. *See Murrell v. Sch. Dist. No. 1, Denver*, 186 F.3d 1238, 1250 (10th Cir. 1999).

37. *Id.*

38. *See Nabozny v. Podlesny*, 92 F.3d 446, 454-55 (7th Cir. 1996).

39. *See id.* at 454.

40. *See id.* at 455.

41. *See generally id.*

42. *Id.* at 452.

43. *Id.* at 455.

44. *See Podlesny*, 92 F.3d at 457.

viewed in the light of the law at the time, was unlawful.”<sup>45</sup> In 1996, the Seventh Circuit wrote:

[T]he Constitution prohibits intentional invidious discrimination between otherwise similarly situated persons based on one’s membership in a definable minority, absent at least a rational basis for the discrimination. There can be little doubt that homosexuals are an identifiable minority subjected to discrimination in our society. Given the legislation across the country both positing and prohibiting homosexual rights, that proposition was as self-evident in 1988 as it is today.<sup>46</sup>

This proposition has only become clearer in the wake of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which granted same-sex couples the fundamental right to marriage under the Equal Protection Clause;<sup>47</sup> and the introduction of the Equality Act, which highlights the many areas where federal law still permits overt discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity.<sup>48</sup>

*b. First Amendment Retaliation.* Students have brought successful First Amendment retaliation claims when school personnel have discriminated against them based on their sexual orientation.<sup>49</sup> In order to prevail on such a claim, the student must prove that the speech in question was (1) constitutionally protected and (2) “a substantial or motivating factor” for “the adverse action.”<sup>50</sup> The school then has the opportunity to demonstrate that it would have taken the same action had the student not engaged in protected speech.<sup>51</sup>

For example, in *Wolfe v. Fayetteville, Arkansas School District*,<sup>52</sup> school personnel responded to allegations of harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation by: (1) telling the complainant, in front of his harasser, not to cry “like a little baby”; (2) making false accusations against the complainant to Fayetteville Police; (3) participating in a Facebook smear campaign against the complainant; and (4) publicly releasing the complainant’s student records.<sup>53</sup> Based on this evidence, the District Court denied the school’s motion to dismiss the First Amendment retaliation claim.<sup>54</sup> The Eighth Circuit affirmed this denial of motion to dismiss based on the District Court’s reasoning that the plaintiff had shown affirmative acts of retaliation amounting to adverse actions that could be

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45. *Id.*

46. *Id.*

47. *See generally* *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015).

48. Equality Act, S. 1858, H.R. 3185, 114th Cong. (2015); *see also* Equality Act, H.R. 15, 118th Cong. (2023) (reintroduced by Rep. Mark Takano on June 21, 2023).

49. *See, e.g.*, *Henkle v. Gregory*, 150 F. Supp. 2d 1067, 1075–76 (D. Nev. 2001).

50. *Id.* at 1075.

51. *Id.*

52. *Wolfe v. Fayetteville Sch. Dist.*, 600 F. Supp. 2d 1011 (W.D. Ark. 2009).

53. *Id.* at 1021.

54. *Id.*

construed as retaliatory.<sup>55</sup> The Court also noted that to prove a Title IX deliberate indifference claim against a school district, there needs to be proof of sex-based motivation.<sup>56</sup>

## 2. Federal Statutory Law: Title IX<sup>57</sup>

Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 reads in relevant part, “No person . . . shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”<sup>58</sup>

Although Title IX refers to sex and not to sexual orientation or gender identity, in January 2001, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) Office for Civil Rights (OCR) released guidance suggesting that discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to gender stereotypes should be considered sex discrimination.<sup>59</sup> The majority of courts have adopted this interpretation.<sup>60</sup> In 2024, the USED amended the regulations implementing Title IX to clarify recipients’ obligations not to discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity in education programs or activities.<sup>61</sup> During the proposal process of this amendment in April 2023, the USED suggested articulating a specific standard governing recipients’ obligations with regard to student athletics programs.<sup>62</sup> This standard would require Title IX recipients to ensure their criteria for student placement in athletics programs do not limit or deny students’ ability to participate on a team consistent with their gender identity.<sup>63</sup> If this standard was not met, the recipient would have to show the criteria (i) were “substantially related to the achievement of an important educational objective” and (ii) minimize

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55. *Wolfe v. Fayetteville Sch. Dist.*, 648 F.3d 860, 867 (8th Cir. 2011).

56. *Id.* at 865.

57. Some advocates have sought to establish Gender Identity Disorder (GID) as a disability, *see infra* note 130 (discussing judicial decisions extending state disability protections to transgender people); however, GID has been explicitly excluded from the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12211 (2015), and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 705 (2014).

58. 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a) (1972).

59. *See generally* Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties, 66 Fed. Reg. 5512, 5512 (Jan. 19, 2001).

60. *See Hoffman v. Saginaw Pub. Sch.*, No. 12–10354, 2012 WL 2450805, at \*8–9 (E.D. Mich. June 27, 2012); *see also Pratt v. Indian River Cent. Sch. Dist.*, 803 F. Supp. 2d 135, 151–52 (N.D.N.Y. 2011); *Seiwert v. Spencer-Owen Cmty. Sch. Corp.*, 497 F. Supp. 2d 942, 953 (S.D. Ind. 2007); *Theno v. Tonganoxie Unified Sch. Dist.* No. 464, 394 F. Supp. 2d 1299, 1307 (D. Kan. 2005). *But see Patenaude v. Salmon River Cent. Sch. Dist.*, No. 3:03-CV-1016, 2005 WL 6152380, at \*6–7 (N.D.N.Y. Feb. 16, 2005) (holding that even though student was called names with a sexual connotation, there was no finding of sex discrimination as none of the names referred explicitly to gender).

61. Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance, 34 C.F.R. § 106 (2024). *But see Trainor, supra* note 6 (rescinding 2024 Title IX regulations).

62. Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance: Sex-Related Eligibility Criteria for Male and Female Athletic Teams, 88 Fed. Reg. 22860, 22860–91 (proposed Apr. 13, 2023) (to be codified at 34 C.F.R. § 106).

63. *Id.* at 22860.

harms to the impacted students.<sup>64</sup> This is the same standard governing sex-based classifications under the Equal Protection Clause.<sup>65</sup> However, the USED ultimately chose not to incorporate the proposed student athletics programs standard; rather, they stated that they were “continuing to evaluate comments on that proposed regulation” and would issue a final rule in the future.<sup>66</sup>

*a. Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students.* As a threshold matter for a Title IX claim, plaintiffs must prove that they were, in fact, discriminated against based on a failure to conform to gender stereotypes.<sup>67</sup> Where plaintiffs were called gay slurs but testified to reasons for the bullying other than perceived homosexuality, courts have been reluctant to find that Title IX applies.<sup>68</sup> For example, in *A.E. ex rel. Evans v. Harrisburg School District No. 7*,<sup>69</sup> the plaintiff speculated that he was teased for his height and “because he had a ‘pretty boy face, like Prince Charming,’” or because his harasser wanted to fit in with the cool kids.<sup>70</sup> The district court found that he could not avail himself of Title IX’s protections.<sup>71</sup> Some courts have suggested that “homophobic slur[s]” are among “a variety of generic middle school insults.”<sup>72</sup> Without evidence that the plaintiff behaved in a way that failed to conform to gender stereotypes, these courts have refused to allow Title IX claims to proceed.<sup>73</sup>

At the same time, at least one court has allowed a Title IX suit to proceed absent evidence of the plaintiff’s failure to conform to gender stereotypes, reasoning that the perpetrator deliberately chose homophobic terms to harass the plaintiff.<sup>74</sup> In *Theno v. Tonganoxie Unified School District No. 464*,<sup>75</sup> even though the plaintiff testified that he was teased for his unique haircuts and for participating in taekwondo,<sup>76</sup> the District Court found that “instead of simply picking on him by using non-sexual terms such as ‘geek’ or ‘weirdo,’ [the bullies] resorted to crude gestures, teasing, and name calling with sexual innuendos in an effort to debase and derogate his masculinity.”<sup>77</sup> Where a plaintiff’s “expressive gestures

64. *Id.*

65. *Id.* at 22872.

66. Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance, 34 C.F.R. § 106 33474, 33817 (2024). However, these regulations have been struck down in district court. *See Tennessee v. Cardona*, No. 2: 24-072-DCR, 2025 WL 63795 (E.D. Ky. Jan. 9, 2025).

67. *See Theno v. Tonganoxie Unified Sch. Dist. No. 464*, 394 F. Supp. 2d 1299, 1302 (D. Kan. 2005).

68. *A.E. ex rel. Evans v. Harrisburg Sch. Dist. No. 7*, No. 6:11-CV-6255-TC, 2012 WL 4794314, at \*2-3 (D. Or. Oct. 9, 2012).

69. *See generally id.*

70. *Id.* at \*3.

71. *Id.*

72. *See Doe ex rel. Conner v. Unified Sch. Dist. 233*, No. 12-2285-JTM, 2013 WL 3984336, at \*5 (D. Kan. Aug. 1, 2023).

73. *See, e.g., Hoffman v. Saginaw Pub. Sch.*, No. 12-10354, 2012 WL 2450805, at \*11 (E.D. Mich. June 27, 2012).

74. *See Theno v. Tonganoxie Unified Sch. Dist. No. 464*, 394 F. Supp. 2d 1299, 1304 (D. Kan. 2005).

75. *Id.*

76. *Id.*

77. *Id.* at 1307.

and manner of speaking [are] of a nature stereotypically associated” with the opposite sex, courts are even more likely to allow a Title IX suit to proceed than when bullies have used only homophobic epithets.<sup>78</sup>

However, not every court has considered this issue, and one court has declined to follow OCR’s previous guidance. Specifically, the Western District of New York only recognizes Title IX claims where discrimination is based on a plaintiff’s male or female sex.<sup>79</sup> For example, in *Preston v. Hilton Cent. Sch. Dist.*,<sup>80</sup> the plaintiff’s Title IX claims were dismissed because the contention that bullies called the plaintiff homophobic slurs and asked him sexually suggestive questions was not sufficient proof that the plaintiff was targeted because of his gender.<sup>81</sup>

*b. Transgender Students.* Title IX poses challenges for transgender students, but it may also offer protection from discrimination. Title IX regulations allow schools to provide separate locker rooms, toilets, and shower facilities to each sex so long as the facilities are comparable in terms of quality and are provided in proportionate quantity.<sup>82</sup> Schools may also offer certain sex-segregated classes, such as human sexuality, physical education, and chorus.<sup>83</sup> Under these regulations, schools have excluded transgender children from gender-corresponding sports and facilities by citing a need to segregate students based on their sex assigned at birth.<sup>84</sup>

In 2013, the OCR, the DOJ, and a school district entered a resolution in response to allegations of sex-based discrimination against a transgender student.<sup>85</sup> This resolution reasoned that under Title IX, schools should separate students based on gender rather than natal sex.<sup>86</sup> The underlying complaint alleged that a transgender student’s middle school had both denied him access to sex-specific school facilities designated for boys’ use during school and extracurricular programs and had prohibited him from residing in the male dorms during a school-sponsored

78. See, e.g., *Pratt v. Indian River Cent. Sch. Dist.*, 803 F. Supp. 2d 135, 152 (N.D.N.Y. 2011); *J.R. v. New York City Dep’t of Educ.*, No. 14 CIV. 0392 ILG RML, 2015 WL 5007918, at \*6 (E.D.N.Y. Aug. 20, 2015); *Harrington ex rel. Harrington v. City of Attleboro*, Case No: 15-cv-12769-DJC, 2018 WL 475000, at \*5–6 (D. Mass. Jan. 17, 2018); *Cianciotto ex rel. D.S. v. New York City Dept. of Educ.*, 600 F. Supp. 3d 434, 452 (S.D.N.Y. 2022).

79. See *Preston v. Hilton Cent. Sch. Dist.*, 876 F. Supp. 2d 235, 243–44 (W.D.N.Y. 2012).

80. *Id.*

81. *Id.*

82. 34 C.F.R. § 106.33 (2000).

83. *Id.* § 106.34.

84. See, e.g., *G.G. ex rel. Grimm v. Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd.*, 132 F. Supp. 3d 736, 740 (E.D. Va. 2015) (“It shall be the practice of the [Gloucester County Public Schools] to provide male and female restroom and locker room facilities in its schools, and the use of said facilities shall be limited to the corresponding biological genders, and students with gender identity issues shall be provided an alternative appropriate private facility.”).

85. See RESOLUTION AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE ARCADIA UNIFIED SCH. DIST., U.S. DEP’T OF EDUC. OFF. FOR C.R., & U.S. DEP’T OF JUST., No. 09-12-1020 (OCR), No. 169-12C-70 (DOJ) (2013), <https://perma.cc/KXE7-27E8> [hereinafter ARCADIA SETTLEMENT].

86. See generally *id.* at 1, 3. For an academic discussion of this theory, see Erin E. Buzuvis, “On the Basis of Sex”: Using Title IX to Protect Transgender Students from Discrimination in Education, 28 Wis. J.L. GENDER & SOC’Y 219, 221 (2013).

academic overnight trip.<sup>87</sup> Without admitting unlawful conduct, the school district agreed to allow the student access to male-designated facilities for the remainder of his educational career and to implement new district-wide policies to ensure that transgender students and students who do not conform to sex stereotypes retain an equal opportunity to participate in school programs.<sup>88</sup> The USED previously took this position in since-rescinded policy guidance.<sup>89</sup>

Title IX provides an exemption for religious institutions whose religious practices are inconsistent with the requirements of the statute.<sup>90</sup> These institutions are exempt from Title IX requirements in admissions, housing, access to bathrooms, and/or athletics opportunities as they pertain to transgender students.<sup>91</sup>

*c. Liability*<sup>92</sup>. Once a plaintiff has established that Title IX applies, they must still overcome several hurdles to prevail on a Title IX claim. A plaintiff must prove that: (1) the school had actual knowledge of discrimination based on sex; (2) the discrimination was so “severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it [could] be said to deprive the [plaintiff] of access to” educational opportunities; and (3) the school was deliberately indifferent to the discrimination.<sup>93</sup> Only institutions receiving federal funding can be liable under Title IX and there is no individual liability.<sup>94</sup>

(1) Actual Knowledge. Neither federal law nor the Supreme Court has specified what level or type of official must have been informed of the discrimination or harassment to prove that the school district itself has been put on notice.<sup>95</sup> Lower courts have found that the school board itself does not necessarily need to be informed; it is sufficient for someone with the authority to address the discrimination

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87. ARCADIA SETTLEMENT, *supra* note 85, at 1.

88. *Id.* at 3–4.

89. Enforcement of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 with Respect to Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Light of *Bostock v. Clayton County*, 81 Fed. Reg. 32637 (June 22, 2021). *But see* Trainor, *supra* note 6 (rescinding 2024 Title IX regulations).

90. 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a)(3) (2015); 34 C.F.R. § 106.12(a) (2013).

91. For more information regarding religious exemptions, see Liam Stack, *Colleges Obtain Waivers to Law that Protects Transgender Students*, N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 10, 2015), <https://perma.cc/RG8T-DFU6>.

92. Circuits are split as to whether § 1983 can be used to enforce Title IX or whether Title IX’s only remedies lie in the text of the statute: the Second, Third, and Seventh Circuits hold that Title IX preempts § 1983 while the Sixth, Eighth, and Tenth Circuits allow § 1983 actions to enforce Title IX. Compare Bruneau *ex rel.* Schofield v. South Kortright Cent. Sch. Dist., 163 F.3d 749, 758–759 (2nd Cir. 1998) (holding that § 1983 actions are pre-empted under Title IX actions); Pfeiffer v. Marion Cent. Area Sch. Dist., 917 F.2d 779, 789 (3d Cir. 1990) (same); Boulahanis v. Bd. of Regents, 198 F.3d 633, 640 (7th Cir. 1999) (same), with Lillard v. Shelby Cnty. Bd. of Educ., 76 F.3d 716, 722–24 (6th Cir. 1996) (holding that § 1983 actions may be used to enforce Title IX); Crawford v. Davis, 109 F.3d 1281, 1284 (8th Cir. 1997) (same); Seamon v. Snow, 84 F.3d 1226, 1233–34 (10th Cir. 1996) (same). *But see* Fitzgerald v. Barnstable Sch. Comm., 555 U.S. 246, 258 (2009) (finding that a Title IX claim does not preclude relief under § 1983).

93. See Davis v. Monroe Cnty. Bd. of Educ., 526 U.S. 629, 633 (1999); see also Hoffman v. Saginaw Pub. Sch., No. 12-10354, 2012 WL 2450805, at \*6 (E.D. Mich. June 27, 2012).

94. See Schroeder *ex rel.* Schroeder v. Maumee Bd. of Educ., 296 F. Supp. 2d 869, 879 (N.D. Ohio 2003).

95. See Doe *ex rel.* Conner v. Unified Sch. Dist. 233, No. 12-2285-JTM, 2013 WL 3984336, at \*4 (D. Kan. Aug. 1, 2023).

on behalf of the school district to have been notified.<sup>96</sup> Where a plaintiff did not previously complain about discrimination to school officials, a court is unlikely to find that the school district had actual knowledge of the discrimination.<sup>97</sup>

(2) Severe, Pervasive, and Objectively Offensive. Courts are divided on what it means for discrimination to be “so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that . . . [it] deprive[s] the [plaintiff] of access to . . . educational opportunities.”<sup>98</sup> Some courts have insisted that a plaintiff’s grades must suffer in order to prove that they were deprived of educational opportunities.<sup>99</sup> Other courts have suggested that a disrupted school environment<sup>100</sup> or deprivation of non-academic school resources, such as access to the school cafeteria or school bus, is sufficient.<sup>101</sup>

(3) Deliberate Indifference. Finally, in order to satisfy the deliberate indifference requirement, the school’s reaction to the discrimination must have been “clearly unreasonable.”<sup>102</sup> Courts emphasize that schools are not required to “‘remedy’ peer harassment,” but merely to respond to it appropriately.<sup>103</sup> However, what constitutes an appropriate response is largely left to the court’s discretion. For example, courts in several cases have found in favor of schools that responded to every—or almost every—allegation of harassment.<sup>104</sup> Conversely, courts have imposed liability in other cases where the school responded to allegations of harassment in a manner insufficient to stop the harassment.<sup>105</sup> Courts were more likely to find for the plaintiff where the school essentially ignored a plaintiff’s pleas for help or punished the plaintiff alongside or instead of their harasser.<sup>106</sup>

### 3. State Law

States have adopted varying levels of protection for students based on their sexual orientation. These protections are embedded in education laws,<sup>107</sup> public accommodations laws,<sup>108</sup> tort laws,<sup>109</sup> and disability laws.<sup>110</sup>

96. See, e.g., *Schroeder*, 296 F. Supp. 2d at 880.

97. *A.E. ex rel. Evans*, 2012 WL 4794314, at \*3.

98. See, e.g., *Davis*, 526 U.S. at 650.

99. See *Shaposhnikov v. Pacifica Sch. Dist.*, No. C 04-01288 SI, 2006 WL 931731, at \*8 (N.D. Cal. Apr. 11, 2006) (finding that because plaintiff graduated with a 4.0 at the top of his class, his educational opportunities could not have been significantly interfered with).

100. See *Riccio v. New Haven Bd. of Educ.*, 467 F. Supp. 2d 219, 228 (D. Conn. 2006) (determining that the plaintiff’s educational opportunities were denied even though the plaintiff’s grades did not drop because students taunted her, threw objects at her during class time, and she was denied access to school counseling sessions).

101. Cf. *Montgomery v. Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 709*, 109 F. Supp. 2d 1081, 1094 (D. Minn. 2000).

102. See *Doe ex rel. Conner v. Unified Sch. Dist. 233*, No. 12-2285-JTM, 2013 WL 3984336, at \*6 (D. Kan. Aug. 1, 2013).

103. *Id.*

104. See, e.g., *Shaposhnikov*, 2006 WL 931731, at \*6; see also *N.K. v. St. Mary’s Springs Acad.*, 965 F. Supp. 2d 1025, 1035 (E.D. Wis. 2013).

105. *Theno v. Tonganoxie Unified Sch. Dist. No. 464*, 394 F. Supp. 2d 1299, 1311 (D. Kan. 2005).

106. *Seiwert v. Spencer-Owen Cmty. Sch. Corp.*, 497 F. Supp. 2d 942, 954 (S.D. Ind. 2007).

107. See *infra* section II.A.3.

108. See *infra* section II.A.3.

109. See *infra* section II.A.3.

110. See *infra* section II.A.3.

Nineteen states and the District of Columbia (D.C.) have state-level non-discrimination laws that protect students from discrimination based on their sexual orientation,<sup>111</sup> and seventeen states and D.C. prohibit discrimination or harassment based on gender identity in schools.<sup>112</sup> While school districts may opt to forgo state funding rather than comply with anti-discrimination laws designed to protect transgender students, no school district has elected to do so thus far.<sup>113</sup> Similar to the Title IX exemption afforded to religious institutions in the federal context, six states exempt educational institutions controlled by religious organizations from the application of anti-discrimination laws that would not be consistent with the religious tenets of that organization.<sup>114</sup>

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111. CAL. EDUC. CODE § 220 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 1017 of 2024 Reg. Sess.); COLO. REV. STAT. ANN. § 24-34-301 (West, Westlaw through leg. effective Mar. 7, 2025 of the 1st Reg. Sess. of the 75th Gen. Assemb. (2025)); CONN. GEN. STAT. ANN. § 10-15C (West, Westlaw through the 2024 Reg. Sess. and the 2024 June Special Sess.); D.C. CODE ANN. § 2-1402.41 (West, Westlaw through Jan. 5, 2025); 775 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 5/1-102 (West, Westlaw through P.A. 103-1059 of the 2024 Reg. Sess.); IOWA CODE ANN. § 216.9 (West, Westlaw through 11/5/2024 from the 2024 Reg. Sess. and the Nov. 5, 2024, Gen. Election); ME. REV. STAT. ANN. tit. 5, §§ 4601-4602 (West, Westlaw through the 2023 2d Reg. Sess. of the 131st Legis.); MASS. GEN. LAWS ANN. Ch. 76, § 5 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 139 of 2024 2d Annual Sess.); MINN. STAT. ANN. § 363A.13 (West, Westlaw through all legislation from the 2024 Reg. Sess.); N.J. STAT. ANN. § 10:5-12 (West, Westlaw through L.2024, c. 109 and J.R. No. 6.); OR. REV. STAT. ANN. § 659.850 (West, Westlaw through laws of the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the 82d Legis. Assemb.); VT. STAT. ANN. tit. 16, § 11 (West, Westlaw through Acts of the Reg. Sess. of the 2024–2025 Vt. Gen. Assemb.); WASH. REV. CODE ANN. § 49.60.030 (West, Westlaw through the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Washington Leg.).

112. CAL. EDUC. CODE § 220 (West, Westlaw Ch. 1017 of 2024 Reg. Sess.); COLO. REV. STAT. ANN. § 24-34-301 (West, Westlaw through leg. effective Mar. 7, 2025 of the 1st Reg. Sess. of the 75th Gen. Assemb. (2025)); CONN. GEN. STAT. ANN. § 46a-175 (West, Westlaw through the 2024 Reg. Sess. and the 2024 June Special Sess.); D.C. CODE § 2-1402.41 (West, Westlaw through Jan. 5, 2025); DEL. CODE ANN. tit. 6, § 4503 (through Ch. 3 of the 153d Gen. Assemb. (2025-2026)); IOWA CODE ANN. § 216.9 (West, Westlaw through 11/5/2024 from the 2024 Reg. Sess. and the Nov. 5, 2024, general election); MASS. GEN. LAWS ANN. Ch. 76, § 5 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 284 of the 2024 2d Ann. Sess.); MINN. STAT. ANN. § 121A.031 (West, Westlaw through all legis. from the 2024 Reg. Sess.); N.J. STAT. ANN. 18A:37-14 (West, Westlaw through L.2024, c. 109 and J.R. No. 6.); N.M. STAT. ANN. § 28-1-2 (West, Westlaw through 2024 2d Reg. Sess. of the 56th Leg.); N.Y. EDUC. LAW §§ 11, 16 (West, Westlaw through L.2025, Ch. 1 to 49, 61 to 107); N.C. GEN. STAT. ANN. § 115C-407.15 (West, Westlaw through the end of the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Gen. Assemb.); OR. REV. STAT. ANN. §§ 174.100, 659.850 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the 82d Legis. Assemb.); 11 R.I. GEN. LAWS ANN. § 11-24-2.1 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 457 of the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Rhode Island Leg.); VT. STAT. ANN. tit. 16, § 11 (West, Westlaw through Acts of the Reg. Sess. of the 2025-2026 Vt. Gen. Assemb. (2025)); WASH. REV. CODE ANN. § 49.60.040 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Washington Legis.); *Doe v. Reg'l Sch. Unit 26*, 86 A.3d 600, 604–05 (Me. 2014) (interpreting ME. REV. STAT. ANN. tit. 5, §§ 4552, 4553, subd. § 9-C, 4602) (interpreting laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex as protecting one's gender identity and one's biological sex).

113. No school district has rejected state funding, but a school has rejected a \$10,000 grant specifically for a LGBTQIA+ student organization. See Petula Dvorak, *LGBTQ+ Teens Won a Grant For Their School. Adults Sent The Money Back*, WASH. POST (Nov. 23, 2023), <https://perma.cc/5X5A-9FK6>.

114. CAL. EDUC. CODE § 221 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 1017 of 2024 Reg. Sess.); CONN. GEN. STAT. ANN. § 46a-81aa (West, Westlaw through all enactments of the 2024 Reg. Sess. and the 2024 June Special Sess.); 775 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 5/5-101(A)(11) (West, Westlaw through P.A. 103-1066 of the 2024 Reg. Sess.); IOWA CODE ANN. § 216.9 (West, Westlaw through Nov. 4, 2024 from the 2024 Reg. Sess. and the Nov. 5, 2024 Gen. Election); N.M. STAT. ANN. § 28-1-9 (West, Westlaw through 2024

Legal challenges to anti-discrimination statutes that protect transgender students have been largely unsuccessful.<sup>115</sup> In California, two plaintiffs challenged Sections 220 and 210.7 of the California Education Code.<sup>116</sup> The plaintiffs argued that the California Legislature had “recklessly abandon[ed] the traditional understanding of biological sex in favor of an elusive definition that is unconstitutionally vague,” and alleged that the laws violated non-transgender students’ privacy and safety rights under the California Constitution by permitting transgender students to use gender-corresponding restrooms.<sup>117</sup> The court dismissed the plaintiffs’ suit, finding that the complaint failed “to allege any invasion of privacy” and that the alleged safety concerns were “conclusory and . . . unsupported.”<sup>118</sup>

Six states and D.C. have enacted public accommodations laws that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and apply explicitly to schools.<sup>119</sup> Another thirteen states’ public accommodations laws prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and could be interpreted to apply to schools.<sup>120</sup> The public accommodations laws of California,<sup>121</sup> Maine,<sup>122</sup>

2d Reg. Sess. of the 56th Leg.); N.Y. EDUC. LAW § 17 (McKinney, Westlaw through L.2024, Chs. 1 to 49, 61 to 107).

115. See Tyler Brown, Note, *The Dangers of Overbroad Transgender Legislation, Case Law, and Policy in Education: California’s AB 1266 Dismisses Concerns About Student Safety and Privacy*, 2014 BYU EDUC. & L.J. 287, 297–311 (2014).

116. See *Cal. Educ. Comm. v. O’Connell*, No. 34-2008-00026507-CU-CR-GDS (Cal. Super. Ct. 2009), <https://perma.cc/V4VC-73PG>.

117. Jennifer Johnson, *Transgender Youth in Public Schools: Why Identity Matters in the Restroom*, 40 WM. MITCHELL L. REV. 63, 79 n.82 (2014) (citing First Amended Complaint for Declaratory & Injunctive Relief at 2, 10, *Cal. Educ. Comm. v. O’Connell*, No. 37-2008-00077546-CU-CRCTL).

118. *Id.* at 80 n.85 (citing Minute Order at 3, *Cal. Educ. Comm. v. O’Connell*, No. 34-2008-00026507-CU-CR-GDS).

119. COLO. REV. STAT. ANN. § 24-34-601 (West, Westlaw through legis. effective Mar. 7, 2025 of the 1st Reg. Sess., 75th Gen. Assemb. (2025)); D.C. CODE ANN. § 2-1402.01 (West, Westlaw through Jan. 5, 2025); 775 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 5/1-102 (West, Westlaw through P.A. 103-1066 of the 2024 Reg. Sess.); IOWA CODE ANN. §§ 216.7, 216.2 (West, Westlaw through 11/5/2024 from the 2024 Reg. Sess. and the Nov. 5, 2024 Gen. Election); N.J. STAT. ANN. §§ 10:5-5, 10:5-12 (West, Westlaw laws through L.2024, c. 109 and J.R. No. 6.); VT. STAT. ANN. tit. 9, § 4501 (West, Westlaw through Acts of the Reg. Sess. of the 2025-2026 Vt. Gen. Assemb.); WASH. REV. CODE ANN. §§ 49.60.215, 49.60.40 (West, Westlaw through all legis. from the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Washington Leg.).

120. CAL. CIV. CODE § 51 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 1 of 2023-24 2d Ex. Sess. and all laws through Ch. 1017 of 2024 Reg. Sess.); DEL. CODE ANN. tit. 6, § 4504 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 3 of the 153d Gen. Assemb. (2025-2026)); HAW. REV. STAT. ANN. § 489-3 (West, Westlaw through the 2024 Reg. and 1st Spec. Sess.); ME. REV. STAT. ANN. tit. 5 §§ 4591–92 (West, Westlaw through the 2023 2d Reg. Sess. of the 131st Leg.); MD. CODE ANN., STATE GOV’T § 20-301 (West, Westlaw through all legis. from the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Gen. Assemb.); MASS. GEN. LAWS ANN. Ch. 272, §§ 92A, 98 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 284 of the 2024 2d Ann. Sess.); MINN. STAT. ANN. § 363A.11 (West, Westlaw through all legis. from the 2024 Reg. Sess.); N.H. REV. STAT. ANN. §§ 354-A:2, 354-A:17 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 1 of the 2025 Reg. Sess.); N.M. STAT. ANN. § 28-1-7 (West, Westlaw through Chs. effective July 1, 2024 of the 2024 2d Reg. Sess. of the 56th Legis. (2023)); OR. REV. STAT. ANN. §§ 659A.400, 659A.030 (West, Westlaw through laws of the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the 82d Legis. Assemb.); 11 R.I. GEN. LAWS ANN. § 11-24-2.3 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 457 of the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the R.I. Legis.); VT. STAT. ANN. tit. 9, § 4501 (West, Westlaw through Acts of the Reg. Sess. of 2025–2026 Vt. Gen. Assemb. (2025)); WIS. STAT. ANN. § 106.52 (West, Westlaw through 2023 Act 272).

121. See *Walsh v. Tehachapi Unified Sch. Dist.*, 827 F. Supp. 2d 1107, 1123 (E.D. Cal. 2011).

122. See *Doe v. Reg’l Sch. Unit 26*, 86 A.3d 600, 605 (Me. 2014).

Minnesota,<sup>123</sup> and Washington<sup>124</sup> have already been applied to protect LGBTQIA+ youth in schools; the remaining states' public accommodations laws remain untested. State laws may afford greater protections or preferred remedies to plaintiffs. For example, the New Jersey Superior Court's Appellate Division decided that the Law Against Discrimination should follow the same plaintiff-friendly requirements for a hostile work environment claim, rather than adhere to the stringent liability requirements for Title IX.<sup>125</sup>

Plaintiffs seeking redress for gender identity or sexual orientation-based discrimination in schools have alleged a number of tort law violations with varying levels of success. For example, plaintiffs have been able to state claims in various forums for negligence,<sup>126</sup> bystander emotional distress,<sup>127</sup> and negligent infliction of emotional distress ("NIED").<sup>128</sup> These claims are not universally successful, however.<sup>129</sup> Plaintiffs have been less successful when alleging intentional infliction of emotional distress.<sup>130</sup>

Like the federal disability laws, many state disability laws either explicitly exclude gender identity disorder or exclude it through judicial interpretation.<sup>131</sup> However, state courts in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York have extended state disability protections to transgender people.<sup>132</sup>

## B. TRANSITIONING IN SCHOOLS

While occupying a relatively small place in the published opinions of federal and state courts, students who are transgender face major challenges to accessing

123. See *Montgomery v. Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 709*, 109 F. Supp. 2d 1081, 1087–88 (D. Minn. 2000).

124. See *Davis v. Fred's Appliance, Inc.*, 287 P.3d 51, 57 (Wash. Ct. App. 2012) (holding that the Washington Law Against Discrimination prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, but the "perceived sexual orientation" of an individual is not a protected class under the statute).

125. *L.W. ex rel. L.G. v. Toms River Reg'l Schs. Bd. of Educ.*, 886 A.2d 1090, 1102–04 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 2005).

126. See, e.g., *A.E. ex rel. Evans v. Harrisburg Sch. Dist. No. 7*, No. 6:11-CV-6255-TC, 2012 WL 4794314, at \*1 (D. Or. Oct. 9, 2012); *Seiwert v. Spencer-Owen Cmty. Sch. Corp.*, 497 F. Supp. 2d 942, 950 (S.D. Ind. 2007). *But see* *Yarbrough v. Denton Indep. Sch. Dist.*, No. 4:20-CV-00433-SDJ-CAN, 2021 WL 4704579, at \*8 (E.D. Tex. Feb. 5, 2021) (holding that the school district, the defendant, is entitled to governmental immunity and is therefore barred from liability of plaintiff's negligence claim).

127. See *Walsh v. Tehachapi Unified Sch. Dist.*, 827 F. Supp. 2d 1107, 1125–26 (E.D. Cal. 2011).

128. See *Seiwert*, 497 F. Supp. 2d at 957. *But see* *Shridhar v. Vantage Travel Serv., Inc.*, No. CV 14-09793-BRO (PJWx), 2016 WL 146076, at \*6–8 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 7, 2016) (finding that the plaintiff cannot prevail on an NIED claim because the plaintiff did not witness the injury-producing event).

129. See *Walsh*, 827 F. Supp. 2d at 1124–25.

130. See, e.g., *Evans*, 2012 WL 4794314, at \*4; *Seiwert*, 497 F. Supp. 2d at 956–57.

131. ACLU, *TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND THE LAW: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS 4* (2015), <https://perma.cc/BQR6-JH8M>.

132. See *Lie v. Sky Publ'g Corp.*, No. 013117J, 2002 WL 31492397, at \*6–7 (Mass. Super. Ct. Oct. 7, 2002); *Enriquez v. W. Jersey Health Sys.*, 777 A.2d 365, 377 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. 2001); *Doe v. Bell*, 754 N.Y.S.2d 846, 851 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 2003); *see also* *Smith v. City of Jacksonville Corr. Inst.*, No. 88-5451, 1991 WL 833882, at \*11–12 (Fla. Div. Admin. Hrgs. Oct. 2, 1991) (holding that GID is within the disability coverage of the Florida Human Rights Act because it falls under the plain meaning of handicap and is the type of handicap that results from the attitudes of others).

public education.<sup>133</sup> Many schools are unprepared to address the privacy and affirmation needs of transgender students, and some school policies and education laws may be outright hostile to them.<sup>134</sup> The section below describes common challenges transgender students face in gaining recognition and acceptance from their schools.<sup>135</sup>

### 1. Required Documentation of Transition

One of the first hurdles transgender students often face when transitioning in school is providing their school with the required documentation of their gender identity. However, in May of 2016, the civil rights divisions of the DOJ and USED jointly issued a Dear Colleague Letter (“DCL”) which provided helpful guidance on schools’ Title IX legal obligations regarding transgender students.<sup>136</sup> The DCL stated that Title IX requires a school to treat a student consistently with the student’s gender identity once the student or the student’s parent or guardian “notifies the school administration that the student will assert a gender identity that differs from previous representations or records.”<sup>137</sup> The DCL specified that “there is no medical diagnosis or treatment requirement that students must meet as a prerequisite to being treated consistent with their gender identity.”<sup>138</sup> A policy requiring full sexual reassignment surgery or genital surgery as a prerequisite for recognition of transition would in many cases act as a *de facto* ban on recognition because some transgender students are unable to obtain sex reassignment surgery due to a lack of funds, age, contraindicating health conditions,<sup>139</sup> or personal

133. Reports from advocates who work directly with transgender youth provide helpful insight into the experiences of transgender youth. See M.V. Lee Badgett, Kellan E. Baker, Kerith J. Conron, Gary J. Gates, Alison Gill, Emily Greytak, & Jody L. Herman, *Best Practices for Asking Questions to Identify Transgender and Other Gender Minority Respondents on Population-Based Surveys (GenIUSS)*, UCLA SCH. OF L. WILLIAMS INST. (Sept. 2014), <https://perma.cc/WJ4A-JTAL>. As highlighted in the 2014 report, there is a lack of population-based data about transgender people, including transgender youth.

134. See NEAL A. PALMER, EMILY A. GREYTAKE, & JOSEPH G. KOSCIW, EDUCATIONAL EXCLUSION: DROP OUT, PUSH OUT, AND THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE AMONG LGBTQ YOUTH 3, 13 (2016), <https://perma.cc/UF4G-XPAM>. Laws that require schools to inform parents if students wish to transition at school can lead to “outing” students without their consent, which can have harmful impacts on LGBTQIA+ youth. See *infra* Section II.F.

135. See STUART BIEGEL, RIGHT TO BE OUT: SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY IN AMERICA’S PUBLIC SCHOOLS 178–79 (Univ. of Minn. Press, 1st ed. 2010). Once the students begin presenting differently, they are immediately out to those who knew them previously. *Id.* Transgender youth may not wish to come out; rather, some may choose to transfer schools to pursue gender transition, or to leave home. *Id.*; see also ASAF ORR & JOEL BAUM, SCHOOLS IN TRANSITION: A GUIDE FOR SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN K-12 SCHOOLS 15 (2015), <https://perma.cc/XYM7-LNBY> (discussing limited privacy options for students who are transitioning).

136. U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. & U.S. DEP’T OF EDUC., DEAR COLLEAGUE LETTER ON TRANSGENDER STUDENTS 1 (2016) [hereinafter *Dear Colleague Letter*], <https://perma.cc/DT9L-V2ZJ>. But note that the Trump Administration later rescinded the *Dear Colleague Letter*, resulting in backlash from groups like the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals. See *Statement on White House Rescinding Dear Colleague Letter on Trans Inclusion*, CONSORTIUM OF HIGHER EDUC. LGBT RES. PROS. (Feb. 15, 2017), <https://perma.cc/5LT8-46VM>.

137. *Dear Colleague Letter*, *supra* note 136, at 2.

138. *Id.*

139. See BIEGEL, *supra* note 135, at 179.

choice.<sup>140</sup> With respect to sex-segregated activities, the DCL explained that Title IX prohibits schools from adopting requirements that “rely on overly broad generalizations or stereotypes about the differences between transgender students and other students of the same sex (*i.e.*, the same gender identity) or others’ discomfort with transgender students.”<sup>141</sup> Federal funding was conditional on compliance with this interpretation of Title IX.<sup>142</sup>

After DCL’s publication, federal courts were left to grapple with whether the DCL guidelines should be given deference, and they came to different conclusions.<sup>143</sup> On October 28, 2016, the Supreme Court granted certiorari on this issue in *G.G. ex rel. Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board*.<sup>144</sup> Grimm, a transgender high school student, alleged that his school’s policy requiring students to use the bathroom corresponding to the sex assigned to them at birth constituted discrimination based on sex, which is a violation of Title IX.<sup>145</sup> On March 6, 2017, the Supreme Court remanded the case to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit for reconsideration in light of the new DCL guidelines.<sup>146</sup> The Fourth Circuit concluded that, as to the question of whether Title IX protections extend to bathroom policies that prohibit transgender students from using the bathroom corresponding to their gender identification, “the answer is resoundingly yes.”<sup>147</sup> The school board appealed, and the Supreme Court denied certiorari on June 28, 2021, allowing the Fourth Circuit’s decision to stand.<sup>148</sup>

## 2. Schools’ Duties

*a. Names and Pronouns.* Experts emphasize that it is very important for transgender youth to have their gender recognized and validated.<sup>149</sup> For example, chosen name use is associated with decreased depressive symptoms and suicidal

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140. See, e.g., *id.* at 175.

141. *Dear Colleague Letter*, *supra* note 136, at 3.

142. *Id.* at 1.

143. In August 2016, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas granted a preliminary injunction, enjoining the U.S. from enforcing the DCL guidelines against Texas schools. *Texas v. United States*, 201 F. Supp. 3d 810, 835 (N.D. Tex. 2016). The court held that the DCL guidelines were not entitled to deference because they were not a reasonable interpretation of “the plain meaning of the term sex as used in [34 C.F.R.] § 106.33.” *Id.* at 832–33. However, the Fourth Circuit overturned a similar ruling, finding that the DCL guidelines are entitled to deference. *G.G. ex rel. Grimm v. Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd.*, 822 F.3d 709, 723 (4th Cir. 2016).

144. *Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd. v. G.G. ex rel. Grimm*, 580 U.S. 1168 (2017); see also *Grimm v. Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd.*, ACLU (last updated Oct. 6, 2021), <https://perma.cc/W43X-7Y7L>.

145. *Grimm v. Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd.*, 972 F.3d 586, 593 (4th Cir. 2020).

146. *Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd.*, 580 U.S. at 1168.

147. *Grimm*, 972 F.3d at 593.

148. *Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd. v. Grimm*, 141 S. Ct. 2878, 2878 (2021). Justice Thomas and Justice Alito would have granted the petition for writ of certiorari. *Id.*

149. See, e.g., *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People*, 70 AM. PSYCH. ASS’N 832, 840 (Dec. 2015), <https://perma.cc/72QC-W7U9>.

ideation among transgender youth.<sup>150</sup> However, roughly 53.4% of transgender students and 48.7% of nonbinary students surveyed by GLSEN reported that they experienced name or pronoun discrimination in school.<sup>151</sup> Advocacy groups argue that if transgender persons are to be protected from discrimination, they should have the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that correspond with their identity.<sup>152</sup> Under the now-rescinded DCL, DOJ and USED previously asserted that under Title IX, “a school must treat students consistent with their gender identity even if their education records or identification documents indicate a different sex.”<sup>153</sup> The three largest school districts in the U.S.—New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago—have already acknowledged the right of transgender students to be addressed by the name and pronouns that correspond with their identity.<sup>154</sup>

*b. Access to Sex-Segregated Spaces.* Transgender students face serious safety concerns when attempting to use gender-corresponding, sex-segregated spaces.<sup>155</sup> In particular, transgender activists have noted increased risks in bathroom facilities where other bathroom users aggressively police sex segregation.<sup>156</sup> GLSEN

150. Stephen T. Russell, Amanda M. Pollitt, Gu Li, & Arnold H. Grossman, *Chosen Name Use Is Linked to Reduced Depressive Symptoms, Suicidal Ideation, and Suicidal Behavior Among Transgender Youth*, 63 J. ADOLESCENT HEALTH 503, 505 (2018).

151. JOSEPH G. KOSCIW, CAITLIN M. CLARK, & LEESH MENARD, THE 2021 NATIONAL SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY: THE EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQ+ YOUTH IN OUR NATION’S SCHOOLS 92 (2021), <https://perma.cc/VWD8-ZZP6>. This survey defined its parameters to include individuals that: “identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual (e.g., homoflexible, questioning) or described themselves as transgender or as having another gender identity that is not cisgender (‘cisgender’ describes a person whose gender identity is aligned with the sex/gender they were assigned at birth).” While the Georgetown Journal of Gender and the Law utilizes the terminology “LGBTQIA+” to refer to the movement as a whole, these research methods are defined differently, which is an important distinction to recognize. The report also found that during the 2020–2021 school year, 29.2% of LGBTQ+ students were prevented from using their chosen name or pronouns in their schools. *Id.* at 32. Cf. Palmer, Greytak & Kosciw, *supra* note 134, at 14 (finding that during the 2012–2013 school year, 10.8% of LGBTQ students were prevented from using their chosen name in their schools).

152. See *Creating a Safe, Supportive, and Affirming School Environment for Transgender and Gender Expansive Students: 2023 Legal Update and Best Practices*, N.Y. STATE DEP’T. OF EDUC. (2023), <https://perma.cc/BC8M-UDJF>; *Fact Sheet: Transgender & Gender Nonconforming Youth in School*, SYLVIA RIVERA L. PROJECT (2015), <https://perma.cc/H8BQ-HY6F>; see, e.g., GAY, LESBIAN & STRAIGHT EDUC. NETWORK, MODEL DISTRICT POLICY ON TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NONCONFORMING STUDENTS: MODEL LANGUAGE, COMMENTARY & RESOURCES 6 (2014), <https://perma.cc/YL9W-J5JL>.

153. *Dear Colleague Letter*, *supra* note 136, at 3.

154. See *Guidelines to Support Transgender and Gender Expansive Students*, N.Y.C. DEP’T OF EDUC., <https://perma.cc/68DX-S28M>; David Holmquist, *Transgender Students—Ensuring Equity and Nondiscrimination*, L.A. UNIFIED SCH. DIST., at 5 (Aug. 20, 2014), <https://perma.cc/TSN4-6ANB>; CHI. PUB. SCHS., GUIDELINES REGARDING THE SUPPORT OF TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NONCONFORMING STUDENTS 4–5, <https://perma.cc/TRH2-38G5>.

155. See Lance S. Weinhardt, Patricia Stevens, Hui Xie, Linda M. Wesp, Steven A. John, Immaculate Apchemenach, David Kioko, Shannon Chavez-Korell, Katherine M. Cochran, Jennifer M. Warren, & Nickolas H. Lambrou, *Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youths’ Public Facilities Use and Psychological Well-Being: A Mixed-Method Study*, 2 *Transgender Health* 140, 146–49 (2017); *Equal Access to Public Restrooms*, LAMBDA LEGAL, at 1 (Feb. 1, 2011), <https://perma.cc/H84W-NR56>.

156. *Equal Access to Public Restrooms*, *supra* note 155, at 1.

reported that 67.7% of transgender students surveyed were required to use the bathroom corresponding to their sex assigned at birth, and 71.3% were required to use the locker room corresponding to their sex assigned at birth while in school.<sup>157</sup> However, an increasing number of schools and districts have adopted policies that allow transgender students to use sex-segregated facilities in accordance with their gender identity.<sup>158</sup>

The DOJ argued in *Grimm* that transgender high school students should be able to use school restrooms that match their gender identity and should not be forced by the school to use the restroom that matches their physical characteristics.<sup>159</sup> The Fourth Circuit held that the DOE's interpretation of its Title IX regulation, which instructed schools to treat transgender students consistent with their gender identity in the case of a transgender individual using a sex-segregated facility, was entitled to deference.<sup>160</sup> On August 3, 2016, the Supreme Court stayed the Fourth Circuit's decision to reverse the district court's dismissal of the plaintiff's Title IX claim, and then granted certiorari to hear the case during the 2016–2017 Term on October 28, 2016; on March 6, 2017, the decision was vacated and remanded to the Fourth Circuit.<sup>161</sup> The Fourth Circuit concluded that Title IX does protect transgender students from school policies preventing them from using the bathroom that corresponds to their gender identification.<sup>162</sup> The school board appealed, but the Supreme Court denied certiorari.<sup>163</sup>

Additionally, the federal government's role in resolution agreements and issuance of published guidance indicates support for student access both to sex-segregated facilities consistent with their gender identities and request access to private facilities. For example, in the settlement with Arcadia Unified School District in California, the federal government requested that schools consider transgender students' occasional increased desire for privacy by making single-use restrooms and changing facilities available for transgender students when such a preference is expressed.<sup>164</sup> Further, in a now-rescinded joint guidance letter, the DOJ and USED stated that the correct interpretation of Title IX requires that schools allow transgender students access to restrooms and locker rooms

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157. Kosciw, Clark, & Menard, *supra* note 151, at 92.

158. See Alia Wong, *The K-12 Binary*, THE ATLANTIC (July 9, 2015), <https://perma.cc/GMZ3-K27Q>; see also GAY, LESBIAN & STRAIGHT EDUC. NETWORK, *supra* note 152, at 6.

159. Statement of Interest of the United States, *G.G. ex rel. Grimm v. Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd.*, 132 F. Supp. 3d 736, 745–46 (4th Cir. 2015); *G.G. ex rel. Grimm v. Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd.*, 822 F.3d 709, 717 (4th Cir. 2016).

160. *Grimm*, 822 F.3d at 721.

161. *Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd. v. G.G. ex rel. Grimm*, 822 F.3d 709 (4th Cir. 2016), *vacated*, 580 U.S. 1168 (2017).

162. *Grimm v. Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd.*, 972 F.3d 586, 593 (4th Cir. 2020).

163. *Supreme Court Allows Gavin Grimm's Victory to Stand*, ACLU (June 28, 2021), <https://perma.cc/W22C-ZAS2>; see also *Gloucester County School Board to Pay \$1.3 Million to Resolve Gavin Grimm's Case*, ACLU (Aug. 26, 2021), <https://perma.cc/BAN3-BQF7>.

164. See ARCADIA SETTLEMENT, *supra* note 85, at 3.

consistent with their gender identity.<sup>165</sup> The USED has since clarified the Title IX requirement that school authorities effectively address sex discrimination by issuing final regulations, which included clarification of the protections due to transgender students.<sup>166</sup>

Transgender students have brought lawsuits against states that have tried to infringe upon their right to use the bathroom that corresponds with their gender identity through legislation.<sup>167</sup> North Carolina received significant public attention following former Governor Patrick McCrory's signing of House Bill 2 into law on March 23, 2016.<sup>168</sup> As a result of House Bill 2, North Carolina boards of education had to require every multiple occupancy bathroom to be used only by students whose biological sex, as stated on their birth certificate, corresponded with the gender designation for the bathroom.<sup>169</sup> The DOJ sued, alleging that the bill violated the Violence Against Women Act, Title IX, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.<sup>170</sup> The District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina enjoined the U.S. from cutting off federal funding to North Carolina for violating these acts, pending an outcome on the merits of the case.<sup>171</sup> In *Carcaño v. McCrory*, individuals and civil liberties organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), brought an action against Governor McCrory, alleging that House Bill 2 discriminated against LGBTQIA+ people in violation of Title IX.<sup>172</sup> This suit was filed on behalf of Joaquin Carcaño, a transgender man who worked at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was denied use of the male bathroom.<sup>173</sup> The court issued a preliminary injunction, enjoining the University of North Carolina from enforcing House Bill 2 on the grounds that USED's guidance regarding "sex" should be given deference.<sup>174</sup> Eventually, following widespread criticism, North Carolina's House Bill 2 was repealed.<sup>175</sup> In more recent years (since 2021), however, laws prohibiting

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165. *Dear Colleague Letter*, *supra* note 136, at 3. In a subsequent Dear Colleague Letter, the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education explained the reasoning behind the withdrawal of the statements of policy and guidance contained in the 2016 Dear Colleague Letter. See *Dear Colleague Letter*, U.S. DEP'T OF JUST. & U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., DEAR COLLEAGUE LETTER 1 (2017), <https://perma.cc/VF53-99N2>.

166. *U.S. Department of Education Releases Final Title IX Regulations, Providing Vital Protections Against Sex Discrimination*, U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC. (Apr. 19, 2024), <https://perma.cc/JBF6-YBGL>.

167. See e.g., *Mathis v. Fountain-Fort Carson Sch. Dist. No. 8*, Charge No. P20130034X, at 1 (Colo. Civ. Rts. Div. June 17, 2013).

168. Tal Kopan & Eugene Scott, *North Carolina Governor Signs Controversial Transgender Bill*, CNN (Mar. 24, 2016), <https://perma.cc/TDC6-T9BE>.

169. N.C. GEN. STAT. § 115C-521.2(b) (repealed 2017).

170. *United States v. North Carolina*, 192 F. Supp. 3d 620, 622 (M.D.N.C. 2016).

171. *Id.* at 629.

172. *Carcaño v. McCrory*, 315 F.R.D 176, 177 (M.D.N.C. 2016).

173. Complaint at 21, 24, 43, 50, *Carcaño v. McCrory*, 315 F.R.D 176, 177 (M.D.N.C. 2016) (No. 1:16-cv-236).

174. *Carcaño*, 315 F.R.D. at 179.

175. Jason Hanna, Madison Park, & Elliott C. McLaughlin, *North Carolina Repeals 'Bathroom Bill'*, CNN POLITICS (Mar. 30, 2017), <https://perma.cc/J62S-F5AT>.

transgender people from using the restroom consistent with their gender identity have found political support in a variety of states.<sup>176</sup>

Additional lawsuits have been filed in other states in which schools have enacted similar biological sex restrictions for bathroom use. For example, Coy Mathis, a first-grader who was assigned male at birth but identifies as female, filed a complaint with the Colorado Civil Rights Division after her public school principal informed her parents that she would no longer be permitted to use the girls' restroom.<sup>177</sup> During kindergarten and a portion of first grade, Coy had been allowed to use the girls' restroom, line up with the girls at recess, wear girls' clothing, and was referred to by staff and faculty as a girl.<sup>178</sup> The Colorado Civil Rights Division found that the school's refusal to allow Coy continued use of the girls' restroom created "an environment rife with harassment and inapposite to a nurturing school atmosphere."<sup>179</sup> It held "[t]elling [Coy] that she must disregard her identity while performing one of the most essential human functions constitutes severe and pervasive treatment, and creates an environment that is objectively and subjectively hostile, intimidating or offensive."<sup>180</sup>

States have continued to pass hostile legislation targeting transgender people. For example, in May 2021, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee signed legislation into law that allows students, parents, and employees to sue public school districts for "psychological, emotional, and physical harm suffered" if transgender students or staff are permitted to use multi-person bathrooms or locker rooms that do not reflect the sex they were assigned at birth.<sup>181</sup> Shortly after, Governor Lee signed a second bill into law requiring businesses and government facilities open to the public to put up a sign informing customers if transgender people are permitted use multi-person restrooms.<sup>182</sup> The Human Rights Campaign has filed a federal lawsuit against Tennessee over the school bathroom measure on behalf of two transgender students, alleging that the statute violates Title IX.<sup>183</sup> Similarly, the

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176. See *Nondiscrimination/LGBTQ Youth: Bans on Transgender People's Use of Bathrooms & Facilities in Government-Owned Buildings & Spaces*, MOVEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT, <https://perma.cc/F7HW-FD74>.

177. Sunnive Brydum, *Not So Elementary: A Trans Student's Fight with Her School*, ADVOCATE (Apr. 5, 2013), <https://perma.cc/44LL-RC6V>.

178. *Mathis v. Fountain-Fort Carson Sch. Dist. No. 8*, Charge No. P20130034X, at 3–4, 9 (Colo. Civ. Rts. Div. June 17, 2013).

179. *Id.* at 12–13.

180. *Id.* at 12.

181. Jonathan Mattise, *Tennessee Gov Signs Transgender 'Bathroom Bill' For Schools*, ASSOCIATED PRESS (May 17, 2021), <https://perma.cc/L8PW-7DU7>.

182. Kimberlee Kruesi & Jonathan Mattise, *Tennessee Bill Mandating Bathroom Signs Called 'Humiliating' for Transgender People*, THE TENNESSEAN (May 20, 2021), <https://perma.cc/BN5Q-QED8>.

183. Kimberlee Kruesi, *Tennessee Sued over Transgender 'Bathroom Bill' for Public Schools*, PBS NEWSHOUR (Aug. 3, 2021), <https://perma.cc/N993-5LKM>; Hannah Sarisohn, *Parents of Transgender 3rd Grader Sue the State over Tennessee School Bathroom Law*, CNN (Aug. 5, 2022), <https://perma.cc/6PXA-47M4>; see also *Complaint at 2, D.H. ex rel. A.H. v. Williamson Cnty. Bd. of Educ.*, No. 3:22-cv-00570, 2022 WL 22288493 (M.D. Tenn. 2022), <https://perma.cc/936M-D2AY>.

ACLU has challenged the law requiring signs to be posted in businesses that allow transgender customers to utilize multi-person restrooms.<sup>184</sup>

*c. Participation in Sports.* Title IX regulations currently allow schools to provide separate athletic opportunities to students of each sex, so long as the programs offer equivalent numbers of opportunities to members of each sex and the programs are of equal quality.<sup>185</sup> However, in 2022, the USED proposed amending Title IX regulations to require recipient schools' criteria for student placement in athletic programs to pass intermediate scrutiny if the criteria would limit or deny students' ability to participate on a team consistent with their gender identity.<sup>186</sup> This provision of the proposed policy did not come to fruition but still clarified schools' obligations under Title IX.<sup>187</sup> Consequently, schools can still exclude transgender students from gender-corresponding physical education classes and participation in sports, as they had before the USED rule was finalized.<sup>188</sup> For example, Mississippi enacted Senate Bill 2536, more commonly known as the "Mississippi Fairness Act," in March 2021.<sup>189</sup> This law requires public schools to have separate sports teams based on biological sex due to the alleged "inherent, physiological differences between males and females."<sup>190</sup> Twenty-five states have passed laws barring transgender students from participating in sports consistent with their gender identities.<sup>191</sup> These policies can have significant negative impacts on transgender students' academic performance because physical education is a graduation requirement in many states.<sup>192</sup> Additionally, given the connection between participation in high school athletics and collegiate athletic recruitment, exclusion from school athletic teams may diminish transgender students' ability to obtain athletic scholarships for higher education.<sup>193</sup>

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184. Ashley Sharp, *Tennessee Transgender Bathroom Bill Put on Pause Due to Ongoing Lawsuit*, WJHL (July 12, 2021), <https://perma.cc/T7DB-W3XR>.

185. 34 C.F.R. § 106.41 (2024).

186. See Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance: Sex-Related Eligibility Criteria for Male and Female Athletic Teams, 88 Fed. Reg. 22860 (proposed April 13, 2023) (to be codified at 34 C.F.R. § 106), *supra* note 62.

187. See Collin Binkley, *Biden's New Title IX Rules Protect LGBTQ+ Students, But Avoid Addressing Transgender Athletes*, Associated Press (Apr. 19, 2024), <https://perma.cc/N7ZZ-HYE9>. The regulation as enacted has faced additional setbacks through various injunctions handed down by federal courts. See Bruce Schreiner, *Biden's Title IX Law Expanding Protections for LGBTQ+ Students is Dealt Another Setback*, ASSOCIATED PRESS (Apr. 19, 2024), <https://perma.cc/FP3R-7TMJ>.

188. See Mollie McQuillan, Suzanne Eckes, & Maria Lewis, *A Solution in Search of a Problem: Justice Demands More for Trans Student-Athletes to Fulfill the Promise of Title IX*, 33 MARQUETTE SPORTS L. REV. 195, 196, 205–08 (2022).

189. S.B. 2536, 136th Leg. Sess., 2021 Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2021).

190. *Id.*

191. *Bans on Transgender Youth Participation in Sports*, MOVEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT, <https://perma.cc/DHK6-DMSN>.

192. See *State Policy Database: Physical Activity Throughout the Day*, NAT'L ASS'N OF STATE BDS. OF EDUC., <https://perma.cc/WC47-2MPN>.

193. Approximately 58% of Division I athletes and 67% of Division II athletes receive some level of athletics-related financial aid. *NCAA Recruiting Facts*, NAT'L COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASS'N., <https://perma.cc/KA2S-A2AR>.

Policy regulating the participation of transgender students varies greatly from state to state. The policies of some states are more progressive and allow transgender students to participate in organized athletics. For example, some statewide athletic associations have issued guidelines that are specifically inclusive of transgender students.<sup>194</sup> Notable among these policies are those of Connecticut and Massachusetts. Agencies in those states have analyzed how their states' statutory bans on gender identity based discrimination apply to sex-segregated athletics.<sup>195</sup> The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education promulgated regulations that give students the right to play on a male or female team, consistent with the students' gender identity.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, the Connecticut State Department of Education has interpreted its anti-discrimination statute to permit school districts to provide single-sex athletic teams with a renewed interest in ensuring privacy for all students, including "gender-diverse students" in this context.<sup>197</sup> Other states, including California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington, as well as D.C., have similar policies allowing students to participate in sports teams consistent with their gender identity, without regard to what their birth certificate might say.<sup>198</sup>

On the other hand, some states' regulations of transgender students' participation in organized athletics tends to restrict participation. For example, the policies of several state athletic associations,<sup>199</sup> require transgender students to participate

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194. Shoshana K. Goldberg & Thee Santos, *Fact Sheet: The Importance of Sports Participation for Transgender Youth*, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS (Mar. 18, 2021), <https://perma.cc/55Q4-JSR9>; see also *Bans on Transgender Youth Participation in Sports*, *supra* note 191.

195. See 603 MASS. CODE REGS. 26.05(3) (2023); *Guidance on Civil Rights Protections and Supports for Transgender or Gender-Diverse Students*, CONN. STATE DEP'T OF EDUC. (Jan. 2024), <https://perma.cc/3ZUP-HEE6>.

196. 603 MASS. CODE REGS. 26.06 (2023); see also *Memorandum from Mitchell D. Chester, Commissioner, Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, Amendments to Regulations on Access to Equal Educational Opportunity, 603 CMR 26.00, and Charter Schools, 603 CMR 1.00—Non-Discrimination Based on Gender Identity*, MASS. DEP'T OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUC. (June 19, 2012), <https://perma.cc/P7B2-WQ3B> ("Excluding a transgender student from a team that does not match the gender listed on the student's birth records would constitute unlawful discrimination on the basis of gender identity.").

197. *Guidance on Civil Rights Protections and Supports for Transgender or Gender-Diverse Students*, *supra* note 195.

198. Katie Barnes, *Alabama to Wyoming: State Policies on Transgender Athlete Participation*, ESPN (June 7, 2022), <https://perma.cc/L4VY-K75U>; see also *Bans on Transgender Youth Participation in Sports*, *supra* note 191.

199. State athletic associations are nonprofit organizations that promulgate rules for inter-school athletic competitions. Federal courts have widely held these organizations to be state actors. See *Brentwood Acad. v. Tenn. Secondary Sch. Athletic Ass'n*, 531 U.S. 288, 298–99 (2001); *Christian Heritage Acad. v. Okla. Secondary Sch. Activities Ass'n*, 483 F.3d 1025, 1030–31 (10th Cir. 2007); see also *Dennin v. Conn. Interscholastic Athletic Conf., Inc.*, 913 F. Supp. 663, 670 (D. Conn. 1996), *vacated on other grounds*, 94 F.3d 96 (2d Cir. 1996) (assuming that the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference, Inc. "is not a private entity operating a place of public accommodations" following discussion of the delegation of control and authority from schools to CIAC); *Johnson v. Fla. High Sch. Activities Ass'n*, 899 F. Supp. 579, 583 (M.D. Fla. 1995), *vacated on other grounds*, 102 F.3d 1172 (11th Cir. 1997); *Sandison v. Mich. High Sch. Athletic Ass'n*, 863 F. Supp. 483, 487 (E.D. Mich. 1994),

on the sports teams that align with the sex listed on their birth certificates.<sup>200</sup> Compounding those regulations, some states, such as Alabama, Georgia, New Mexico and North Carolina, require gender affirmation surgery in order to alter one's birth certificate.<sup>201</sup> Thus, in states with this combination of regulations, state athletic association policies become *de facto* bans on sports participation for transgender youth, preventing them from participating on teams that align with their gender-identity. Hormone-based determinations of sports eligibility generate similar barriers for transgender students seeking participation in organized athletics; given ongoing legislative restrictions, some doctors may be unwilling to prescribe hormones to transgender individuals below a certain age.<sup>202</sup> For example, in Idaho, the Idaho High School Activities Association requires hormone treatment for one year before a male-to-female student athlete is allowed to compete on a girls' team.<sup>203</sup>

Critics of transgender students' participation in school athletics programs argue that cisgender female athletes will be robbed of fair opportunities to compete.<sup>204</sup> The participation of transgender athletes in organized athletics at the collegiate level has been the subject of much criticism and shifting policy as public debate develops. Since 2010, the policy of the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) has condemned opposition to transgender athletes' participation in sports programs for its base assumptions, summarized as follows:

one, that transgender women are not “real” women and therefore not deserving of an equal competitive opportunity; two, that being born with a male body automatically gives a transgender woman an unfair advantage when competing against non-transgender women; and

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*rev'd in part, appeal dismissed in part, on other grounds*, 64 F.3d 1026 (6th Cir. 1995); *Pottgen v. Mo. State High Sch. Activities Ass'n*, 857 F. Supp. 654, 661–62 (E.D. Mo. 1994), *rev'd on other grounds*, 40 F.3d 926 (8th Cir. 1994). These sources demonstrate that state athletic associations are typically authorized by state governments to organize athletic programs in public elementary and secondary schools.

200. See *Alabama High School Athletic Association Handbook 2022-2023*, ALA. HIGH SCH. ATHLETIC ASS'N, <https://perma.cc/FH9U-W27F>; *Georgia High School Association By-Laws for 2024-2025: By-Law 1.00 - Student*, GA. HIGH SCH. ASS'N, <https://perma.cc/D64D-FSH8>; *North Carolina High School Athletic Association 2024-2025 Handbook*, N.C. HIGH SCH. ATHLETIC ASS'N, <https://perma.cc/AA2K-5VAM>; *New Mexico Activities Association Handbook: Section VI (Eligibility)*, N.M. ACTIVITIES ASS'N, <https://perma.cc/8PRT-GBTR>.

201. See ALA. CODE § 22-9A-19(d) (West, Westlaw through Act 2025-35 of the 2025 Reg. Sess.); GA. CODE ANN. § 31-10-23(e) (West, Westlaw through Act 1 of the 2025 Reg. Sess. of the Ga. Gen. Assemb.); N.M. STAT. ANN. § 24-14-25(D) (West, Westlaw through Chs. effective July 1, 2024 of the 2024 2d Reg. Sess. of the 56th Leg. (2023)); N.C. GEN. STAT. ANN. § 130A-118(b) (West, Westlaw through the end of the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Gen. Assemb.). For further discussion of the major challenges transgender youth face seeking gender affirmation surgery, see *infra* Section III.D.1.

202. See *States with Specific Gender Affirming Care Restrictions*, AM. SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASS'N (2024), <https://perma.cc/T427-S9S6>.

203. See *Rules and Regulations 2024-2025: Rule 11-Non-Discrimination Policy*, IDAHO HIGH SCH. ACTIVITIES ASS'N, <https://perma.cc/UK2C-V8PR>.

204. Tyler Brown, *The Dangers of Overbroad Transgender Legislation, Case Law, and Policy in Education: California's AB 1266 Dismisses Concerns About Student Safety and Privacy*, BYU EDUC. & L.J. 287, 306–07 (2014).

three, that men might be tempted to pretend to be transgender in order to compete in competition with women.<sup>205</sup>

After over a decade of debate, the NCAA Board of Governors clarified its position in a Statement on Transgender Participation in April, 2021: “the NCAA Board of Governors firmly and unequivocally supports the opportunity for transgender student-athletes to compete in college sports. This commitment is grounded in our values of inclusion and fair competition.”<sup>206</sup> Substantively, this statement indicates that per NCAA policy, championships should only be hosted at locations that can commit to providing an environment that is “safe, healthy and free of discrimination.”<sup>207</sup>

Following vigorous public debate regarding transgender student Lia Thomas’s participation as a swimmer on the women’s swim team at the University of Pennsylvania, the NCAA announced a new policy regarding transgender athletes’ participation in sports, which imposed several requirements on transgender athletes.<sup>208</sup> Modeled after the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee and International Olympic Committee Guidelines,<sup>209</sup> the new NCAA policy requires transgender athlete participation to be determined on a sport-by-sport basis, meaning that the specific policy for each sport will be determined by that sport’s governing body.<sup>210</sup> Additionally, the NCAA requires transgender student athletes to document testosterone levels starting four weeks before their sport’s championship selections.<sup>211</sup> In addition to this requirement, transgender athletes are required to document their testosterone levels at the beginning of the season and then again six months later.<sup>212</sup> In regard to the policy, John DeGioia, chair of the NCAA Board of Governors, stated that the NCAA is “steadfast in [its] support of transgender student-athletes and the fostering of fairness across college sports,” and that “it is important that NCAA member schools, conferences and college athletes compete in an inclusive, fair, safe and respectful environment and can move forward with a clear understanding of the new policy.”<sup>213</sup> The policy has already been criticized for “lack[ing] clarity” and for being difficult to enforce.<sup>214</sup>

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205. Pat Griffin & Helen Carroll, *NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Student-Athletes*, NCAA OFF. OF INCLUSION 7–8 (Aug. 2011), <https://perma.cc/RSW3-H7EZ>.

206. *NCAA Board of Governors Statement on Transgender Participation*, NCAA (Apr. 12, 2021), <https://perma.cc/4B2Z-8434>.

207. *Id.*

208. Katie Barnes, *NCAA Updates Policy on Transgender Participation, to Let Each Sport Set Eligibility Requirements*, ESPN (Jan. 20, 2022), <https://perma.cc/4H7C-XSWY>; Jenna Lemocelli, *NCAA Adopts New Transgender Policy as Lia Thomas Controversy Brews*, N.Y. POST (Jan. 19, 2022), <https://perma.cc/9MTY-2Z9X>.

209. *Board of Governors Updates Transgender Participation Policy*, NCAA (Jan. 19, 2022), <https://perma.cc/DAQ2-M5XF>.

210. *Id.*

211. *Id.*

212. *Id.*

213. *Id.*

214. Jo Yurcaba, *NCAA’s New Trans Athlete Guidelines Sow Confusion Amid Lia Thomas Debate*, NBC NEWS (Jan. 21, 2022), <https://perma.cc/U7VN-UFRX>.

In addition to regulations and policy changes made by organizations at the state and national level, Congress has sought to regulate the participation of transgender athletes in organized sports through proposed federal legislation.<sup>215</sup> For instance, the “Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act of 2023” would define sex to be “based solely on a person’s reproductive biology and genetics at birth,” and prohibit federally funded sports programs from “permit[ing] a person whose sex is male to participate in an athletic program or activity that is designated for women or girls.”<sup>216</sup> An identical bill was introduced in the Senate.<sup>217</sup> The bill’s stated purpose is to “protect athletic opportunities for female athletes.”<sup>218</sup>

Looking toward the Executive Branch, executive action may prove to be both a sword against or a shield for transgender students’ participation in organized athletics, depending on the political position of the president. For instance, President Biden signed an executive order in January 2021 that prohibited discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation.<sup>219</sup> The order spoke directly to the inclusivity of transgender students in schools, stating “children should be able to learn without worrying about whether they will be denied access to the restroom, the locker room, or school sports.”<sup>220</sup> However, the position of the Executive Branch shifted when President Trump signed an executive order in February 2025 that aimed to limit the participation of transgender women and girls from participating in female sports.<sup>221</sup> The order requires the U.S. Secretary of Education to “take all appropriate action to affirmatively protect all-female athletic opportunities and all-female locker rooms.”<sup>222</sup>

### C. SEX EDUCATION

There is not a uniform approach to sex education in school systems across the country, with federal and state legislation as well as local advocacy leading to the implementation of myriad teachings. As of 2023, twenty-nine states and D.C. have laws requiring some form of sex education: comprehensive, abstinence-only, and/or sexually transmitted infection (STI)/human immunodeficiency virus

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215. Gillian R. Brassil, *How Some States Are Moving to Restrict Transgender Women in Sports*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 11, 2021), <https://perma.cc/VNB5-LNGA>.

216. *Id.*; see also Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act of 2023, H.R. 734, 118th Cong. (2023).

217. Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act of 2023, S. 613, 118th Cong. (2023).

218. Addy Bink, *Utah Senator Lee Introduces Legislation to ‘Protect Athletic Opportunities for Female Athletes.’* ABC4 (Feb. 5, 2021), <https://perma.cc/4TNB-9WV5>.

219. Brassil, *supra* note 215; Exec. Order No. 13,988, 86 Fed. Reg. 7,023 (Jan. 20, 2021).

220. Exec. Order No. 13,988, *supra* note 219.

221. Exec. Order No. 14,201, 90 Fed. Reg. 9,279 (Feb. 5, 2025). The order adopts the definitions of “sex,” “female,” and “male” in a previous executive order signed by President Trump: “sex” refers to “an individual’s immutable biological classification as either male or female”; “female” refers to “a person belonging, at conception, to the sex that produces the large reproductive cell”; and “male” refers to “a person belonging, at conception, to the sex that produces the small reproductive cell.” Exec. Order No. 14,168, 90 Fed. Reg. 8,615 (Jan. 30, 2025).

222. Exec. Order No. 14,201, *supra* note 221.

(HIV)/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)-prevention.<sup>223</sup> Several federal funding streams provide resources for various forms of sex education.<sup>224</sup> Title V of the Welfare Reform Act allocates more than \$50 million per year in grants to states for abstinence-only education.<sup>225</sup> Two funding streams created by Congress in 2010, the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative and the Personal Responsibility Education Program, fund grants to states for comprehensive sex education.<sup>226</sup> Still, the federal funding streams and some of the state laws entrust local school boards with significant discretion.<sup>227</sup> Consequently, sex education varies tremendously from state to state and even between school districts within a particular state.<sup>228</sup>

Within this overall variety of teachings, inclusive and affirming conversation about LGBTQIA+ identities and relationships are limited by requirements imposed on schools in some states. For instance, as of 2024, only ten states require that discussion of LGBTQIA+ identities and relationships be affirming and inclusive.<sup>229</sup> While three states have struck down laws that proscribe discriminatory teaching of LGBTQIA+ issues in school sex education classes,<sup>230</sup> similar laws remain on the books in six states.<sup>231</sup> Among the policies of these six states, there is great variety in the education requirements. Texas law, for example, requires educators to teach that homosexuality is an unacceptable lifestyle.<sup>232</sup> Mississippi requires teachers to “teach[] the current state law with respect to . . . homosexual activity,” given that Mississippi’s anti-sodomy law is still on the

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223. *Sex Ed State Law and Policy Chart*, SEXUALITY INFO. & EDUC. COUNCIL OF THE U.S., at 14–16 (2022), <https://perma.cc/FD9J-HWAN>. For more information about sexual education legislative updates, see SEXUALITY INFO. & EDUC. COUNCIL OF THE U.S., MID-YEAR REPORT 2024 (2024), <https://perma.cc/A5LM-T5UC>.

224. See Matthew Lashof-Sullivan, *Sex Education in Schools*, 16 GEO. J. GENDER & L. 263, 275–76 (2015); *How Sex Education Gets Funding*, PLANNED PARENTHOOD ACTION FUND, <https://perma.cc/TJY2-63AP>.

225. Lashof-Sullivan, *supra* note 224, at 275.

226. *Id.* at 276–77.

227. See *id.* at 264, 277.

228. See *id.* at 264–74.

229. *Sex Education Laws and State Attacks*, PLANNED PARENTHOOD ACTION FUND, <https://perma.cc/5AFU-E8MY>.

230. ALA. CODE § 16-40A-2 (West, Westlaw through Act 2025-62 of the 2025 Reg. Sess.) (striking the Alabama provision on homosexuality); ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 15-120.03 (West, Westlaw through 1st Reg. Sess. of the 57th Legis.) (striking the Arizona provision on homosexuality); UTAH CODE ANN. § 53G-10-402 (West, Westlaw through the 2025 Gen. Sess.) (striking the Utah provision on homosexuality).

231. *Sex Ed State Law and Policy Chart*, *supra* note 223, at 17–19. While this source notes six states have education laws that promote heterosexual marriages and proffer discriminatory education guidelines, South Carolina has, by consent decree, acknowledged that the language present in S.C. CODE ANN. § 59-32-30(A)(5) (West, Westlaw through the 2024 Sess. of the Gen. Assemb.) is not enforceable and will not be used in education policy recommended by the state to school districts.

232. TEX. HEALTH & SAFETY CODE ANN. § 163.002 (West, Westlaw through the end of the 2023 Reg., 2d, 3d and 4th Called Sess. of the 88th Leg.).

books, even though unenforceable since *Lawrence v. Texas* was decided in 2003.<sup>233</sup> Students in Oklahoma are taught that “engaging in homosexual activity, promiscuous sexual activity, intravenous drug use or contact with contaminated blood products is now known to be primarily responsible for contact with the AIDS virus.”<sup>234</sup> Notably, aspects of this law’s educational mandates do not necessarily align with modern scientific understanding of how HIV is transmitted.<sup>235</sup> Likewise, Louisiana law prohibits “sexuality explicit materials depicting male or female homosexual activity” and otherwise prioritizes abstinence.<sup>236</sup> Lastly, North Carolina law mandates teaching students “a mutually faithful monogamous heterosexual relationship in the context of marriage is the best lifelong means of avoiding sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.”<sup>237</sup> On the other hand, the South Carolina law that formerly restricted discussion of LGBTQIA+ issues by educators was found to be unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment in 2020.<sup>238</sup>

In 2022, Florida adopted legislation that severely restricted the ability of school officials to discuss LGBTQIA+ issues.<sup>239</sup> The law, colloquially referred to as the “Don’t Say Gay” law, prohibits discussion about LGBTQIA+ issues for kindergarten through third grade, and requires that discussion on LGBTQIA+ issues for older students be “age appropriate or developmentally appropriate.”<sup>240</sup> The law prompted many Florida schools to pre-emptively remove all references to LGBTQIA+ issues regardless of age, including restrictive policies that range from removing library books to instructing teachers to remove photos of same-sex spouses from their desks.<sup>241</sup> More than a dozen states have considered passing similar legislation.<sup>242</sup> In March 2024, however, Florida reached a settlement with a group of plaintiffs that clarified the bounds of the “Don’t Say Gay” law,

233. *Id.*; MISS. CODE ANN. § 37-13-171(2)(e) (West, Westlaw through the 2025 Reg. Sess.); *see also* *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558, 576–78 (2003).

234. OKLA. STAT. ANN. tit. 70, § 11-103.3 (West, Westlaw through the 2d Reg. Sess. of the 59th Legis.).

235. *See How Is HIV Transmitted?*, HIV.GOV (June 16, 2022), <https://perma.cc/BV66-SWHV> (stating that people most commonly contract or transmit HIV through needle or syringe use or through sexual behavior, including heterosexual vaginal sex).

236. LA. STAT. ANN. § 17:281 (West, Westlaw through the 2024 1st Ex., 2d Ex., Reg., and 3d Ex. Sess.).

237. N.C. GEN. STAT. ANN. § 115C-81.30(a)(5) (West, Westlaw through the end of the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Gen. Assemb.). Illinois formerly mandated that course material and instruction “teach honor and respect for monogamous heterosexual marriage,” but that law was repealed and replaced by LGBTQIA+-inclusive laws. *See* 105 ILCS 5/27-9.1a–1b (West, Westlaw through P.A. 103-1082 of the 2024 Reg. Sess.).

238. S.C. CODE ANN. § 59-32-30(A)(5) (West, Westlaw through the 2024 Reg. Sess.).

239. Ch. 22-22, 2022 Laws of Fla. (H.B. 1557) (codified as amended at FLA. STAT. ANN. § 1001.42 (West, Westlaw through the 2024 2d. Reg. Sess.)).

240. *Id.*

241. Matt Lavietes, *As Florida’s ‘Don’t Say Gay’ Law Takes Effect, Schools Roll out LGBTQ Restrictions*, NBC NEWS (June 30, 2022), <https://perma.cc/QW38-SQKB>.

242. Dustin Jones & Jonathan Franklin, *Not Just Florida. More than a Dozen States Propose So-Called ‘Don’t Say Gay’ Bills*, NPR (Apr. 10, 2022), <https://perma.cc/UH46-HZTQ>.

ultimately resulting in a reduction of the restrictive value of the law.<sup>243</sup> When the law was initially implemented, for example, at least one school used its abstinence-only policy to exclude a Gay-Straight Alliance, also known as a Gender & Sexuality Alliance (GSA) from meeting or advertising on campus.<sup>244</sup> After the settlement, “[t]eachers can put safe space stickers up and also have gay-straight alliances and other kind[s] of LGBTQ[+] clubs at schools.”<sup>245</sup>

However, the law retains some restrictions. For instance, the “law still bans outright instruction about gender and sexuality,” which affects course offerings, course teachings, or books with a unit or section that instruct about gender and sexuality.<sup>246</sup>

Meanwhile, as of 2023, nine states—California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington—and D.C. have laws or regulatory guidance requiring that sex education be LGBTQIA+-inclusive.<sup>247</sup> For example, a California Health and Safety Code provision explicitly prohibits sex education programs from reflecting or promoting bias against LGBTQIA+ people, among other groups.<sup>248</sup> Incongruencies between state policies for sex education and the policies implemented by individual school districts have generated litigation. For example, the Fresno County Superior Court held that the abstinence-only sex education program implemented by Clovis Unified School District violated California students’ right to a complete, medically-accurate, and bias-free sex education.<sup>249</sup> Such litigation may lead individual districts to reform their sex education curriculums. For example, the Clovis Unified School District adopted a sex education curriculum that includes unbiased information about sexual orientation.<sup>250</sup> The policies outlining sex education curricula vary greatly by state, and two states, Iowa and New Mexico, require that their respective sex education curriculum neither affirm nor discriminate against LGBTQIA+ youth.<sup>251</sup>

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243. Stephanie Sy & Shoshana Dubnow, *What Florida’s ‘Don’t Say Gay’ Settlement Changes and What Restrictions Remain*, PBS NEWS (Mar. 14, 2024), <https://perma.cc/RF3F-QP5G>.

244. Caudillo *ex rel.* Caudillo v. Lubbock Indep. Sch. Dist., 311 F. Supp. 2d 550, 556–57, 563 (N.D. Tex. 2004).

245. Sy & Dubnow, *supra* note 243.

246. *Id.*

247. *Sex Ed State Law and Policy Chart*, *supra* note 223, at 17–19.

248. CAL. HEALTH & SAFETY CODE § 151002(a)(6) (West, Westlaw with Ch. 1 of 2023-24 2d Ex. Sess., and all laws through Ch. 1017 of 2024 Reg. Sess.).

249. *Am. Acad. of Pediatrics v. Clovis Unified Sch. Dist.*, No. 12CECG02608 DSB (Cal. Super. Ct. May 4, 2015), <https://perma.cc/U54L-PX2L>.

250. *Historic Ruling in ACLU Lawsuit: Abstinence-Only Sex Ed Violated State Law*, ACLU OF N. CAL. (May 6, 2015), <https://perma.cc/7GZE-L8KN>.

251. *Sex Ed State Law and Policy Chart*, *supra* note 223, at 17–19.

#### D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

In the context of the varied educational environments that students encounter due to state laws, plaintiffs have brought First Amendment claims to vindicate their right to express pro-LGBTQIA+ opinions at school<sup>252</sup> and to start GSAs.<sup>253</sup> However, students' free speech rights at school are not absolute; schools are often considered "limited public forums,"<sup>254</sup> the consequence of which is that schools may prohibit some speech that could not be limited outside the schoolhouse gates.<sup>255</sup> Specifically, schools may prohibit speech that is "vulgar, lewd, obscene, [or] plainly offensive," school-sponsored speech, and speech that causes a "substantial disruption of or material interference with school activities."<sup>256</sup> In addition to the First Amendment, schools are governed by the federal Equal Access Act (EAA), which concerns student organizational expression on campus.<sup>257</sup>

This section addresses the legal landscape pertaining to student organizations (particularly GSAs), students' apparel and appearance, and students' access to LGBTQIA+ information on the Internet at school. This section also discusses faculty and staff freedom of expression in the context of state and local "No Promo Homo" policies, which stigmatize the discussion of LGBTQIA+ people and issues in the classroom.<sup>258</sup>

##### 1. Student Organizations

As of 2019, there are more than 4,000 GSAs throughout the nation, 3,500 of which are represented in the National Association of GSA Networks.<sup>259</sup> About one-third of the LGBTQIA+ students whom GLSEN surveyed during the 2020–2021 school year reported having a GSA or similar club at their school.<sup>260</sup> This subsection will discuss the legal landscape in which these clubs operate.

The EAA prohibits secondary schools that maintain "limited open forums" from discriminating against any student meeting based on "the religious,

252. See, e.g., *Henkle v. Gregory*, 150 F. Supp. 2d 1067, 1074 (D. Nev. 2001) (distinguished on other grounds by *McCarthy v. Underhill*, No. 03:05-CV-0177-LRH-RJJ, 2006 U.S. Dist. (D. Nev. Feb. 16, 2006)).

253. See, e.g., *Caudillo ex rel. Caudillo v. Lubbock Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 311 F. Supp. 2d 550, 556–58 (N.D. Tex. 2004).

254. *Id.* at 560.

255. See *id.* at 571 (quoting *Vernonia Sch. Dist. 47J v. Acton*, 515 U.S. 646, 656 (1995)).

256. *Henkle*, 150 F. Supp. 2d at 1074–75 (quoting *Chandler v. McMinnville Sch. Dist.*, 978 F.2d 524 (9th Cir. 1992) and *Burnside v. Byars*, 363 F.2d 744, 749 (5th Cir. 1966)).

257. 20 U.S.C. § 4071 (West, Westlaw through Pub. L. No. 119-4).

258. GAY, LESBIAN & STRAIGHT EDUC. NETWORK, INCLUSIVE CURRICULAR STANDARDS: REPRESENTATION OF LGBTQ+ AND OTHER MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES PROMOTES STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND WELLBEING 3 (2022), <https://perma.cc/Y8Z4-VXZ4>.

259. Alexander Gabriel, Brandon Stratford, & Heather Steed, *Only 3 states have a gay-straight alliance in more than half of their high schools*, CHILD TRENDS (Oct. 10, 2021), <https://perma.cc/A86X-PF2M> (finding that New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut have a gay-straight alliance in more than half of their high schools); see also GAY STRAIGHT ALLIANCE NETWORK, *Build the GSA Movement*, <https://perma.cc/T7CH-6X4H>.

260. Kosciw, Clark, & Menard, *supra* note 151, at 48 (noting that 17.9% of students reported they normally had a GSA, but the club was unable to meet, possibly because of COVID-19).

political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings.<sup>261</sup> Originally, the EAA was enacted to grant student-led religious groups access to school facilities on the same basis as other student groups.<sup>262</sup> However, it has since been used to allow GSAs to meet on school property.<sup>263</sup> Nonetheless, the EAA does not offer absolute protection to GSAs. State law determines what constitutes a “secondary school,” and states have circumscribed the EAA’s reach by narrowly defining “secondary school” or refusing to define the term at all.<sup>264</sup>

Additionally, schools are able to circumvent the EAA by becoming “closed forums”—that is, by allowing only curricular student groups to meet on campus.<sup>265</sup> A Northern District of Texas court has read a students’ well-being exception into the EAA and banned a GSA, suggesting that a website listed on the club’s poster would threaten students’ well-being.<sup>266</sup> The court also objected to the club’s plans to discuss safer sex, disregarding the school’s abstinence-only policy.<sup>267</sup> However, this case is an exception to the trend in EAA cases.<sup>268</sup>

## 2. Students’ Apparel and Appearance

Generally, schools adopt dress codes with the goal of maintaining orderliness and facilitating instruction in educational environments.<sup>269</sup> Given the restrictions that dress codes place on the student expression, they sometimes run afoul of students’ First Amendment rights. In *Tinker v. Des Moines School District*, the Supreme Court held that students had a First Amendment right to wear black armbands protesting the Vietnam War to class as long as their protest did not cause “substantial disruption” or “material interference with school activities.”<sup>270</sup> The district court in *Gillman v. School Board for Holmes County* applied the *Tinker*

261. 20 U.S.C. § 4071 (West, Westlaw through Pub. L. 119-4).

262. See Michael P. Aaron, *The Equal Access Act: A Haven for High School “Hate Groups”?*, 13 HOFSTRA L. REV. 589, 589–90 (1985).

263. See, e.g., *Boyd Cnty. High Sch. Gay Straight All. v. Bd. of Educ.*, 258 F. Supp. 2d 667, 688 (E. D. Ky. 2003).

264. See *Carver Middle Sch. Gay-Straight All. v. Sch. Bd. of Lake Cnty.*, 124 F. Supp. 3d 1254, 1269 (M.D. Fla. 2015), *vacated*, 842 F.3d 1324 (11th Cir. 2016) (“We conclude that ‘secondary education,’ under Florida law, means at least ‘courses through which a person receives high school credit that leads to the award of a high school diploma.’”).

265. See, e.g., *E. High Gay/Straight All. v. Bd. of Educ.*, 81 F. Supp. 2d 1166, 1197–98 (D. Utah 1999).

266. *Caudillo ex rel. Caudillo v. Lubbock Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 311 F. Supp. 2d 550, 571 (N.D. Tex. 2004).

267. *Id.* at 563.

268. For courts finding for GSAs under the EAA, see *Boyd Cnty.*, 258 F. Supp. at 692–93 (granting preliminary injunction enjoining the school from denying the formation of a GSA club because such denial would most likely violate the EAA); see also *Colin ex rel. Colin v. Orange Unified Sch. Dist.*, 83 F. Supp. 2d 1135, 1151 (C.D. Cal. 2000) (finding that denying the formation of a GSA club would most likely violate the EAA); *East High*, 81 F. Supp. 2d at 1184 (finding EAA granted GSA club the right to meet on school campus because the school allowed a non-curricular student club to meet during that time).

269. RICHARD FOSSEY & TODD A. DEMITCHELL, *STUDENT DRESS CODES AND THE FIRST AMENDMENT IX* (Rowman & Littlefield eds., 2014).

270. *Tinker*, 393 U.S. 503 at 512-14.

test and held that the school board's prohibition on students' clothing, buttons, or apparel that advocated acceptance and fair treatment of LGBTQIA+ people violated the students' First Amendment right to free speech.<sup>271</sup>

Public high schools and elementary schools may restrict speech that injures or encroaches on the rights of other students.<sup>272</sup> The Ninth Circuit has permitted schools to ban student speech when it targets a classmate's race, sexual orientation, or religion, reasoning that such speech may damage the classmate's self-esteem.<sup>273</sup> In *Harper v. Poway Unified School District*, the court held that a school did not violate the First Amendment when it kept a student out of class for wearing a T-shirt bearing an anti-gay message.<sup>274</sup> However, other courts have held that students have a First Amendment right to wear T-shirts printed with anti-gay slogans.<sup>275</sup>

Transgender students often rely on clothing and other appearance-related indicators to express their gender identity.<sup>276</sup> Students have challenged the overall application of gender-specific dress codes,<sup>277</sup> as well as the enforcement of gender-specific dress rules for special events, like senior portraits<sup>278</sup> or prom.<sup>279</sup>

### 3. Access to Information on the Internet

Many LGBTQIA+ youth rely on the Internet to find information on same-sex attraction and sexual health.<sup>280</sup> In 1996, Congress began a federal funding program called E-Rate to offset telecommunication and Internet costs for schools

271. *Gillman v. Sch. Bd. for Holmes Cnty.*, 567 F. Supp. 2d 1359, 1375-79 (N.D. Fla. 2008).

272. *See Harper v. Poway Unified Sch. Dist.*, 445 F.3d 1166, 1183 (9th Cir. 2006) (dicta), *vacated as moot*.

273. FOSSEY & DEMITCHELL, *supra* note 269, at 95.

274. *Harper*, 445 F.3d 1166 at 1191-92.

275. *See, e.g., Chambers v. Babbitt*, 145 F. Supp. 2d 1068, 1073 (D. Minn. 2001).

276. *See, e.g., Ethan C. Cicero & Linda M. Wesp, Supporting the Health and Well-Being of Transgender Students*, 33 J. SCH. NURSING 1, 6 (2017).

277. *See, e.g., Order Granting Preliminary Injunction, A.C. v. Magnolia Indep. Sch. Dist.*, No. H-21-3466 at \*1 (S.D. Tex. Nov. 4, 2021); *Hayden v. Greensburg Cmty. Sch. Corp.*, 743 F.3d 569, 571 (7th Cir. 2014); *Doe ex rel. Doe v. Yunits*, No. 00-1060A, 2001 WL 36648072 at \*1 (Mass. Super. Ct. Feb. 26, 2001); *see also DRESSED AND READY TO LEARN: A RESOURCE FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND EDUCATORS TO IDENTIFY, CHALLENGE AND CHANGE GENDERED DRESS CODES IN K-12 SCHOOLS*, Legal Momentum (2022), <https://perma.cc/EP7B-XV72>.

278. *See, e.g., Charles Joughin, Justice for Jeydon: Senior Yearbook Will Not Bar Transgender Student*, HRC BLOG (Nov. 15, 2013), <https://perma.cc/BL4W-2236>; Jill Tucker & Henry K. Lee, *Students rally around tux-wearing teen left out of yearbook*, SFGATE (May 17, 2014), <https://perma.cc/W6H2-F6ML>; Galen Sherwin, Linda Morris, & Eleanor Wachtel, *4 Things Public Schools Can and Can't Do When It Comes to Dress Codes*, AM. C.L. UNION BLOG (Sept 21, 2022), <https://perma.cc/D6MA-H9CS>.

279. *See, e.g., McMillen v. Itawamba Cnty. Sch. Dist.*, 702 F. Supp. 2d 699, 702 (N.D. Miss. 2010); *Logan v. Gary Cmty. Sch. Corp.*, No. 2:07-CV-431 JVB, 2008 WL 5062802 at \*5 (N.D. Ind. Sept. 25, 2008); *Know Your Rights: Same-Sex Dates and School Dances*, LAMBDA LEGAL, <https://perma.cc/4QJ2-5ZJS>.

280. Daniel Delmonaco & Oliver L. Haimson, "Nothing that I was specifically looking for" LGBTQ+ youth and intentional sexual health information seeking, *J. OF LGBT YOUTH* 1, 2 (May 10, 2022).

and libraries.<sup>281</sup> As a result of the program's implementation in 1998, nearly all public schools have had access to the Internet.<sup>282</sup> However, Congress also passed the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) in 2000.<sup>283</sup> Under CIPA, every school that receives certain federal funds or discounts must install a technology protection measure to block student access to obscenity, child pornography, and content that is "harmful to minors."<sup>284</sup> Acting in over-compliance with CIPA, many schools initially blocked well-known LGBTQIA+-positive websites, depriving LGBTQIA+ students of vital online resources.<sup>285</sup>

In February 2011, the ACLU launched a campaign titled "Don't Filter Me" aimed at unblocking LGBTQIA+-friendly websites at public schools.<sup>286</sup> In response to the ACLU's demand letters, the majority of schools the ACLU approached voluntarily adjusted their filtering software.<sup>287</sup> However, the ACLU did sue one recalcitrant school. In that case, *Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Inc. v. Camdenton R-III. School District*,<sup>288</sup> the District Court for the Western District of Missouri held that the school district's filtering policy violated the First Amendment and ordered the school district to stop filtering LGBTQIA+-friendly websites.<sup>289</sup> The court also made clear that although students could request that websites be unblocked, there was still a constitutional violation.<sup>290</sup>

The ACLU also approached software-filtering companies, and as a result, several companies agreed to remove their LGBTQIA+-specific category and categorize nonsexual LGBTQIA+ websites as "social science, history, or other appropriate areas."<sup>291</sup> Other software companies declined to change their categories but did issue public statements and improved their customer guidance, explaining their categories and emphasizing that schools should not block nonsexual LGBTQIA+ content.<sup>292</sup>

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281. Emily Wagner, *Event marks two decades of connecting schools and libraries to the internet*, AMERICAN LIBRARIES MAGAZINE (Jan. 30, 2018), <https://perma.cc/Y5PZ-H5K7>.

282. *Id.*

283. FED. COMM. COMM'N, *Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)* (Jul. 5, 2024), <https://perma.cc/HB5N-ZGH6>.

284. *Id.*

285. *Parents, Fam., & Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Inc. v. Camdenton R-III Sch. Dist.*, 853 F. Supp. 2d 888, 891 (W.D. Mo. 2012); see also *Don't Filter Me: Final Report*, AM. C.L. UNION 3–6 (2012), <https://perma.cc/6SBB-2ULQ> [hereinafter "Don't Filter Me" Report] (stating school internet filters blocked the following: PFLAG; DignityUSA; Matthew Shepard Foundation; Campus Pride; Day of Silence; Evangelicals Concerned; The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation; Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network; Human Rights Campaign; and Lambda Legal—all of which are informative LGBTQIA+ websites that do not contain pornography and are fully appropriate under CIPA); Michelle Deininger, *Park City students fight online filters for LGBTQ searches* (Mar. 21, 2021), <https://perma.cc/ALJ7-ZBGU>.

286. "Don't Filter Me" Report *supra* note 285, at 3.

287. *Id.* at 5.

288. *Parents, Fam., & Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Inc.*, 853 F. Supp. 2d at 890.

289. *Id.* at 899–901.

290. *Id.* at 898.

291. "Don't Filter Me" Report, *supra* note 285, at 7.

292. *Id.* at 7–9 (explaining how each software company responded to ACLU's requests).

#### 4. Faculty and Staff

A multitude of state laws restrict whether and how educators discuss LGBTQIA+ issues at school. While Alabama deleted the provisions of its sexual education statute requiring teachers to “emphasize . . . that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state,”<sup>293</sup> more than a dozen states retain “No Promo Homo” laws described in Section II-D.<sup>294</sup> Some school districts have also voluntarily adopted “No Promo Homo” policies in the absence of state law.<sup>295</sup> Two bills passed in 2023 prohibit school staff from mentioning sexuality and gender identity in schools.<sup>296</sup> Since 2023, at least ten bills have passed that permit staff to use incorrect pronouns and deadname students.<sup>297</sup> For example, an Arkansas law forbids educators from referring to unemancipated students by names or pronouns that are not on their birth certificates absent written consent from a parent or guardian.<sup>298</sup> North Dakota has passed a similar law.<sup>299</sup> In Iowa, a law requires teachers to report any requests made by students to use different pronouns or names to administrators, who are then required to report it to the parents.<sup>300</sup> In 2023, Tennessee legislators amended their legal code to allow teachers to disregard students’ preferred pronouns as to respect teachers freedom of speech.<sup>301</sup> Indiana passed a law that requires teachers to inform parents if a student requests to be referred to by a name or pronouns that are not on their birth certificate.<sup>302</sup>

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293. ALA. CODE § 16-40A-2 (West, Westlaw through Act 2025-62 of the 2025 Reg. Sess.) (deleting former (c)(8) and revising (a)(1)).

294. “No Promo Homo” laws prohibit teachers and staff from discussing LGBTQIA+ issues in a positive light, if at all. See LA. STAT. ANN. § 17:281 (Westlaw through 2024 1st Extra., 2d Extra., Reg., and 3d Extra. Sess.); MISS. CODE ANN. § 37-13-171 (West, Westlaw through 2025 Reg. Sess.); OKLA. STAT. ANN. tit. 70, § 11-103.3 (West, Westlaw through 2d Reg. Sess. of the 59th Legis.) & OKLA. ADMIN. CODE § 210:15-17-2 (West, Westlaw through Volume 42, No. 13); S.C. CODE ANN. § 59-32-30 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Sess. of the Gen. Assemb.); TEX. HEALTH & SAFETY CODE ANN. §§ 85.007, 163.002 (West, Westlaw through 2023 Reg., 2d, 3d, and 4th Called Sess. of the 88th Legis.).

295. See, e.g., Savannah Tryens-Fernandes, *Alabama legislature passes surprise ‘Don’t Say Gay’ amendment, transgender bathroom restrictions*, AL.COM (May 19, 2023).

296. *2023 Anti-LGBTQ Laws in the Classroom*, POINT FOUNDATION (July 13, 2023), <https://perma.cc/2C8J-PAVU>.

297. Eesha Pendharkar, *Pronouns for Trans, Nonbinary Students: The States With Laws That Restrict Them in Schools*, EDUCATIONWEEK (June 14, 2023), <https://perma.cc/423F-3F74> (highlighting that Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Montana, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Utah have all passed laws allowing teachers to disregard students’ requested pronouns and gender identities).

298. H.B. 1468, 94th Gen. Assemb. Reg. Sess. (Ark. 2023).

299. See H.B. 1522, 68th Legis. Assemb. (N.D. 2023) (forbidding teachers from using a student’s preferred name or pronouns unless the student underwent gender-affirming surgery before the law’s enactment and has written consent from a parent).

300. S.F. 496, 91st Gen. Assemb. Reg. Sess. (Iowa 2023).

301. TENN. CODE ANN. § 49-6-5102 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 21 of the 2025 1st Reg. Sess. of the 114th Tenn. Gen. Assemb.).

302. IND. CODE § 20-33-7.5-2 (West, Westlaw through 2024 2d Reg. Sess. of the 123d Gen. Assemb. 2024).

Two states have repealed these types of laws and policies within the last ten years: Arizona in 2019 and North Carolina in 2017.<sup>303</sup> Similarly, in 2013, the Anoka-Hennepin School District in Minnesota revised its policy after several students sued the school claiming that the policy inhibited the school from addressing rampant bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.<sup>304</sup>

## E. BULLYING, HARASSMENT, AND VIOLENCE

### 1. Bullying and Harassment

According to GLSEN's 2021 National School Climate Survey, 60.7% of LGBTQIA+ students in grades six through twelve reported verbal harassment based on their sexual orientation during the 2020–2021 school year;<sup>305</sup> 57.4% described verbal harassment based on gender expression,<sup>306</sup> 22.4% experienced physical harassment based on sexual orientation, and 20.6% reported physical harassment based on gender expression.<sup>307</sup> Moreover, 8.8% of LGBTQIA+ students surveyed were physically assaulted for their sexual orientation and 8.2% for their gender expression.<sup>308</sup>

Bullying and harassment have a tangible effect on these students' lives: 32.2% of the students surveyed had missed at least one day of school in the month preceding the survey because they feared for their safety or felt uncomfortable; 11.3% missed four or more days.<sup>309</sup> Bullying and harassment also affect students' academic outcomes. Students who experienced higher levels of bullying had, on average, lower GPAs than those who experienced less harassment.<sup>310</sup> Students who were severely bullied were twice as likely as other students to report to GLSEN that they did not intend to attend college, technical school, or trade school.<sup>311</sup>

The suicide rate for LGBTQIA+ youth is also significantly higher than it is for their straight and cisgender peers. Of the 40,000 LGBTQIA+ respondents to the 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth have seriously contemplated suicide,<sup>312</sup> and over

303. ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN. § 15-716 (Westlaw through 2024 2d Reg. Sess. of the 56th Ariz. Gen. Assemb.); N.C. GEN. STAT. ANN. § 115C-81 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the N.C. Gen. Assemb.).

304. Consent Decree, *Doe v. Anoka-Hennepin Sch. Dist.* No. 11, No. 11-cv-01999-JNE-SER (D. Minn. Mar. 6, 2012), <https://perma.cc/L4AJ-ACGM>.

305. Kosciw, Clark, & Menard, *supra* note 151, at 19.

306. *Id.*

307. *Id.*

308. *Id.* at 20.

309. *Id.* at xv.

310. *Id.* at xix–xx (noting that LGBTQIA+ students who experienced identity-based discrimination at school had an average GPA of 2.92, while their peers who experienced no anti-LGBTQIA+ discrimination had an average GPA of 3.20; students who experienced higher levels of in-person victimization based on gender identity had an average GPA of 2.76).

311. Kosciw, Clark, & Menard, *supra* note 151, at xix.

312. *National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2020*, TREVOR PROJECT 1–2 (2020), <https://perma.cc/WMW6-TKVD>.

40% of all LGBTQIA+ youth respondents seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months.<sup>313</sup>

LGBTQIA+ students and their families use each of the laws discussed in Section II, with varying levels of success, to try to hold schools and school officials accountable for bullying and for allowing peer-to-peer bullying to persist unimpeded. In addition, twenty states and D.C. have laws or pending legislation explicitly requiring schools to implement policies that prohibit bullying on the basis of a number of protected classes, including sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>314</sup>

Enumerated anti-bullying policies have become the goal for organizations like GLSEN because these policies appear to be more effective at preventing anti-LGBTQIA+ bullying and harassment than generic anti-bullying policies.<sup>315</sup> These policies “specifically protect students based on their actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion.”<sup>316</sup> Additionally, teachers in schools with enumerated anti-bullying policies are more likely to intervene to stop bullying and harassment.<sup>317</sup>

Enumerated anti-bullying policies that “proscribe student speech that ‘materially disrupts classwork or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of others’” are constitutional.<sup>318</sup> For example, the District Court for the Southern District of Ohio upheld that school policies which would allow speech that is

313. *Id.*

314. ARK. CODE ANN. § 6-18-514 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the 94th Ark. Gen. Assemb.); CAL. EDUC. CODE § 234.1 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Cal. Gen. Assemb.); COLO. REV. STAT. ANN. § 22-32-109.1 (West, Westlaw through 2024 2d. Reg. Sess. of the 74th Colo. Gen. Assemb.); CONN. GEN. STAT. ANN. § 10-222d (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Conn. Gen. Assemb.); D.C. Code Ann. §§ 2-1535.01-.09 (West, Westlaw through 2024); 105 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 5/27-23.7 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Ill. Gen. Assemb.); IOWA CODE ANN. § 280.28 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Iowa Gen. Assemb.); ME. REV. STAT. ANN. tit. 20-A, § 6554 (Westlaw through 2024 2d. Reg. Sess. of the 131st Me. Gen. Assemb.); MD. CODE ANN., EDUC. § 7-424.1 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Md. Gen. Assemb.); MASS. GEN. LAWS ANN. Ch. 71, § 370 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 129 of 2024 2d Ann. Sess. of the Mass. Gen. Assemb.); MINN. STAT. ANN. § 121A.031 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Minn. Gen. Assemb.); NEV. REV. STAT. ANN. § 388.122 (West, Westlaw through 2023 Reg. Sess. of the 82d Nev. Gen. Assemb.); N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§ 193-F:2-10 (West, Westlaw through 2023 Reg. Sess. of the N.H. Gen. Assemb.); N.J. STAT. ANN. § 18A:37-15 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the N.J. Gen. Assemb.); N.M. Stat. Ann. §§ 22-35-1-4 (West, Westlaw through 2024 2d Reg. Sess. of the 56th N.M. Gen. Assemb.); N.Y. EDUC. LAW § 13 (McKinney, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the N.Y. Gen. Assemb.); N.C. GEN. STAT. ANN. §§ 115C-407.15 to .16 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the N.C. Gen. Assemb.); OR. REV. STAT. ANN. § 339.356 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the 82d Or. Gen. Assemb.); 11 R.I. GEN. LAWS ANN. §§ 16-21-33 to -34 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the R.I. Gen. Assemb.); VT. STAT. ANN. tit. 16, § 11 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg. Sess. of the Vt. Gen. Assemb.); Wash. Rev. Code Ann. § 9A.36.080 (West, Westlaw through 2024 of the Wash. Leg.). *See also State Maps*, GLSEN, <https://perma.cc/MM3L-4QUJ>.

315. *Enumeration of Statewide Anti-Bullying Laws and Local Policies*, GLSEN, <https://perma.cc/ERR4-KNE3>.

316. *Id.*

317. *See id.*

318. *Parents Defending Educ. v. Olentangy Loc. Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ.*, 684 F. Supp. 3d 684, 690 (S.D. Ohio 2023) (*citing Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Cmty. Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503, 513 (1969)).

hostile towards transgender students would result in devastating consequences.<sup>319</sup> The court, in issuing its decision, did not follow the Third Circuit, which was particularly fixated on expression of values as core First Amendment activity in *Saxe*.<sup>320</sup> The court in *Parents Defending Education* instead held that speech that creates a hostile environment for school children withstands First Amendment scrutiny because it prevents schools from conducting their core mission of educating students.<sup>321</sup>

## 2. Suicides and Murders

LGBTQIA+ youth experience a great deal of violence in the form of verbal bullying and harassment during middle school and high school from their peers.<sup>322</sup> Transgender youth, especially young people of color, are more likely to experience violence victimization, substance use, and suicide risk.<sup>323</sup> This subsection discusses the statistical disparities in violence suffered by LGBTQIA+ youth and legal protections against excessive violence.

Primarily as a result of school bullying and family rejection,<sup>324</sup> LGBTQIA+ youth suffer from low self-esteem, feelings of isolation, and depression.<sup>325</sup> On top of, and sometimes because of, the abuse suffered by LGBTQIA+ youth, many experience homelessness.<sup>326</sup> As a result of these combined pressures, LGBTQIA+ youth die by suicide at disproportionately higher rates.<sup>327</sup>

It is estimated that LGBTQIA+ youth are three to four times more likely to attempt suicide and more than four times more likely to die by suicide than non-LGBTQIA+ youth.<sup>328</sup> A 2011 Oregon study of over 30,000 eleventh grade students found that 21.5% of LGBQ youth attempted suicide in the previous twelve months, compared with 4.2% of non-LGBQ youth.<sup>329</sup> The study also found that

319. *Parents Defending Educ.*, 684 F. Supp. 3d at 690.

320. *Id.* at 684; *Saxe v. State Coll. Area Sch. Dist.*, 240 F.3d 200, 210 (3d Cir. 2001).

321. *Parents Defending Educ.*, 684 F. Supp. 3d at 700.

322. See Kosciw, Clark, & Menard, *supra* note 151, at 19–20.

323. Johns MM, Lowry R, Andrzejewski J, Barios LC, Demissie Z, McManus T, Rasberry CN, Robin L, Underwood JM, *Transgender Identity and Experiences of Violence Victimization, Substance Use, Suicide Risk, and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among High School Students—19 States and Large Urban School Districts*, 2017. *MMWR Morb. Mortal Wkly. Rep.* 2019; 68: 67–71., 67. <https://perma.cc/46WD-WJFV>; see also *2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health*, TREVOR PROJECT 5 (2022), <https://perma.cc/A2N6-5F3R>.

324. See Abramovich, Pang, & MacKinnon, *Investigating the mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness in York Region, Ontario*, *CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERV. REV.* 5 (2023), <https://perma.cc/3FHZ-3X9A>.

325. See *id.*

326. See *2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health*, *supra* note 323.

327. Nearly one in five transgender and nonbinary youth attempted suicide and LGBTQIA+ youth of color reported higher rates than their white peers. See *2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health*, *supra* note 323.

328. *New Research on LGBTQ+ Teen Suicide Rates*, *NEWPORT ACADEMY* (2024), <https://perma.cc/JVA9-WGAQ>.

329. Mark L. Hatzenbuehler, *The Social Environment and Suicide Attempts in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth*, 127 *PEDIATRICS* 896, 896 (2011), <https://perma.cc/BR7Z-FHX3>.

the risk of suicide attempts for LGBQ youth was 20% higher in unsupportive environments than in supportive environments.<sup>330</sup> A 2016 study found that almost half of all transgender individuals surveyed had attempted suicide.<sup>331</sup> In the past year, nearly 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth attempted suicide and LGBTQIA+ youth of color reported higher rates of suicide attempts compared to their white peers.<sup>332</sup> Moreover, transgender students who were denied access to a school bathroom that corresponded with their gender identity were reportedly 1.32 times more likely to attempt suicide than transgender individuals who were provided access to restrooms that match their gender identity.<sup>333</sup> The subject of bathrooms as they relate to rights for transgender persons is discussed in a later section of this Article.<sup>334</sup> National initiatives like the “It Gets Better” campaign have been developed to provide hope to LGBTQIA+ youth contemplating suicide.<sup>335</sup>

Young people continue to face threats of murder and hate crimes by their peers because of their sexual orientation and gender expression.<sup>336</sup> In response to two horrific murders against gay youths, President Obama signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act in 2009, which expands the prior federal hate crime definition to include crimes motivated by gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability.<sup>337</sup> In addition to funding investigation and prosecution of hate crimes, the Act grants the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) the authority to pursue cases that are neglected by local authorities,<sup>338</sup> as well as track data on crimes based on gender identity and sexual orientation.<sup>339</sup>

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330. *Id.* at 896, 899–900.

331. Kristie L. Seelman, *Transgender Adults' Access to College Bathrooms and Housing and the Relationship to Suicidality*, 68 GA. STATE J. HOMOSEXUALITY 1378, 1391 (2016), <https://perma.cc/RU9L-GBTN>.

332. *2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health*, *supra* note 323, at 5.

333. Seelman, *supra* note 331, at 1389–91.

334. *See* discussion *infra*, Section V-D.

335. The “It Gets Better” project was founded in 2010 to send the message to LGBTQIA+ youth that life does get better as those around them mature. *See About Our Global Movement*, IT GETS BETTER PROJECT, <https://perma.cc/LF7T-K5CC>. To view a statement issued by the White House Office of Communications lending its support to the campaign, *see* Brian Bond, “It Gets Better,” White House Off. of Commc’ns, 2010 WL 3946661 (Oct. 9, 2010).

336. *See* Rob Wile, *It’s Still Dangerous to be Gay in America. Here are the Statistics that Prove It*, SPLINTER (June 12, 2016), <https://perma.cc/MC3Z-8AVA> (stating that between 20–25% of lesbian and gay people report experiencing hate crimes in their lifetimes, that killings of LGBTQ individuals have surged since 2007, and that transgender women of color are particularly vulnerable); *see also* Sylvia Cunningham, *James Dixon Pleads Guilty to Manslaughter of Transgender Woman Islan Nettles*, NBC NEWS (Apr. 4, 2016), <https://perma.cc/QAG5-UTCF> (describing the beating of a trans woman of color in Harlem that resulted in her death); Ramin Setoodeh, *Young, Gay and Murdered*, NEWSWEEK (July 18, 2008), <https://perma.cc/MT84-QCQY> (describing the anti-gay-motivated murder of 15-year-old Lawrence “Larry” King by a teenage classmate).

337. Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, 18 U.S.C.A. § 249 (West, Westlaw through Pub. L. No. 118–106).

338. *See Anti-Defamation League, Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA): What You Need to Know*, ADL (Feb. 27, 2015), <https://perma.cc/G4P7-5HXP>.

339. *See The Law that Bears Matt’s Name: Six Years Later*, MATTHEW SHEPARD FOUND. (Oct. 28, 2015), <https://perma.cc/B36X-XU8U>.

According to data released by the FBI, 16.7% of hate crimes committed in 2019 were motivated by bias against the victim's sexual orientation.<sup>340</sup> An analysis of the data reveals that gay and lesbian individuals report hate crimes at a higher rate per capita than any other group.<sup>341</sup> LGBTQIA+ youth of color experience increased violence due to intersectional discrimination.<sup>342</sup> A 2017 report by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs found that, of all anti-LGBTQIA+ homicides in 2016, 79% were committed against people of color and 68% against transgender individuals.<sup>343</sup> The disproportionately high murder rate of transgender individuals<sup>344</sup> has prompted campaigns such as "Trans Lives Matter."<sup>345</sup> Thirty-three states and D. C. have passed hate crime laws that protect LGBQ individuals, but only twenty-two states and D.C. protect transgender individuals as well.<sup>346</sup>

#### F. STUDENT PRIVACY AND LEGAL RECOURSE FOR "OUTING" BY SCHOOL OFFICIALS

Coming out is often an intensely personal decision, involving self-discovery and acceptance.<sup>347</sup> "Outing," in the context of this section, occurs when a third-party reveals another individual's sexual orientation or gender identity against the individual's wishes.<sup>348</sup> Outings can be devastating experiences, provoking feelings of anxiety and fear of the consequences of exposure and "slic[ing] into human dignity by stealing individual control [of] one's life."<sup>349</sup> As of 2024, eight states have laws explicitly requiring schools to out transgender students to their parents,<sup>350</sup> while five states have laws that promote, but do not require, this

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340. *Hate Crime Statistics*, FBI (Nov. 16, 2020), <https://perma.cc/P5W4-2NRX>.

341. Joseph R. Williams, "I Don't Like Gays, Okay?" *Use of the "Gay Panic" Murder Defense in Modern American Courtrooms: The Ultimate Miscarriage of Justice*, 78 ALB. L. REV. 1129, 1132 (2014–2015), <https://perma.cc/B2Y5-MFRK>.

342. See Wile, *supra* note 336.

343. *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Hate Violence in 2016*, NAT'L COAL. OF ANTI-VIOLENCE PROGRAMS 9 (2017), <https://perma.cc/Y5HT-XXRN>.

344. *Addressing Anti-Transgender Violence, Exploring Realities, Challenges and Solutions for Policymakers and Community Advocates*, HUM. RTS. CAMPAIGN 2 (Nov. 2015), <https://perma.cc/64DX-V26M> (finding that at least twenty-one transgender people were killed in the U.S. in the first ten months of 2015, a higher rate than any year on record). For a world-wide mapping of transphobic murders, see *Trans Murder Monitoring Project*, TRANSGENDER EUR. (Nov 13, 2024), <https://perma.cc/K5E5-AHFT>.

345. Jen Richards, *It's Time for Trans Lives to Truly Matter to Us All*, ADVOCATE (Feb. 18, 2015), <https://perma.cc/EC2N-9E9E>.

346. *Hate Crime Laws*, MOVEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT (Mar. 3, 2022) <https://perma.cc/UZL2-L6TV>.

347. Evan Ettinghoff, Note, *Outed At School: Student Privacy Rights And Preventing Unwanted Disclosures Of Sexual Orientation*, 47 LOY. L.A. L. REV. 579, 582 (2014), <https://perma.cc/G7JH-ASTR>.

348. *Id.* at 581.

349. Kathleen Guzman, *About Outing: Public Discourse, Private Lives*, 73 WASH. U. L. REV. 1531, 1548 (1995), <https://perma.cc/GWM9-H6JQ>.

350. *Equality Maps: Forced Outing of Transgender Students in Schools*, MOVEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT, <https://perma.cc/45YC-92VR> (Alabama, Indiana, Idaho, Iowa, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, & Tennessee).

practice.<sup>351</sup> Courts have held that while students do have a privacy interest in their sexual orientation<sup>352</sup> that interest is not absolute.<sup>353</sup> Rather, it is subject to a balancing of the school's interest in disclosure and the student's interest in secrecy.<sup>354</sup> This need for secrecy can be seen in data estimating that 44% of LGBTQIA+ students do not report incidents of harassment or assault to school staff for fear of being outed.<sup>355</sup>

### III. CHALLENGES FACING FAMILIES OF LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

#### A. CONVERSION THERAPY

Approximately 350,000 adults in the U.S. received conversion therapy as adolescents.<sup>356</sup> Conversion therapy<sup>357</sup> is “any attempt to change a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression,”<sup>358</sup> and stems from a belief that identifying as LGBTQIA+ is unnatural or immoral.<sup>359</sup> Although conversion therapy has been practiced for over fifty years,<sup>360</sup> judicial rulings and legislative developments highlight a significant shift away from its acceptability in sociocultural attitudes.<sup>361</sup> For example, the American Psychiatric Association has not listed homosexuality as a mental disorder in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) since 1973; notwithstanding this, believers and practitioners of conversion therapy continue to treat it as one.<sup>362</sup> Gender dysphoria<sup>363</sup>

351. *Id.* (Arizona, Florida, Kentucky, Montana & Utah). Some of these laws and policies may also encourage school officials to out lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer students to their parents as well. *Id.*

352. *Nguon v. Wolf*, 517 F. Supp. 2d 1177, 1191 (C.D. Cal. 2007).

353. *Id.* at 1193.

354. *Id.* at 1195.

355. Kosciw, Clark, & Menard, *supra* note 151, at 27.

356. Christy Mallory, Taylor N.T. Brown, & Kerith J. Conron, *Conversion Therapy and LGBTQ Youth*, UCLA SCH. OF L. WILLIAMS INST. 1 (2019), <https://perma.cc/U5JL-BG4Y> (defining adolescent as anyone under age eighteen).

357. “Conversion therapy” is also referred to as “sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE),” “reparative therapy,” or “ex-gay ministry.” See *Conversion Therapy*, GLAAD, <https://perma.cc/9MX5-7E6E> [hereinafter *Conversion Therapy*]. See generally #BornPerfect: *The Facts About Conversion Therapy*, NAT’L CTR. FOR LESBIAN RTS., <https://perma.cc/7FH8-LR3V> (detailing the purpose of and evidence for laws banning conversion therapy).

358. *Conversion Therapy*, *supra* note 357.

359. SUBSTANCE ABUSE & MENTAL HEALTH SERVS. ADMIN., *Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth* 21 (2015), <https://perma.cc/ETP2-M42J>.

360. Stephen Vider & David S. Byers, *A Half-Century of Conflict Over Attempts to ‘Cure’ Gay People*, TIME (Feb. 12, 2015), <https://perma.cc/TNG5-ZE5R>; see also Jamie Scot, *Shock the Gay Away: Secrets of Early Gay Aversion Therapy Revealed*, HUFFINGTON POST (Dec. 6, 2017), <https://perma.cc/WNQ8-GN63>.

361. See *infra* Section III.A.1–2.

362. Meaghan Kane, *The Persecution of Minors: Gay to Straight Conversion Therapy*, 15 RUTGERS J.L. & RELIGION 384, 387–88 (2014) (citing Am. Psychiatric Ass’n, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed. 2013); Rick Mayes & Allan V. Horwitz, *DSM III and the Revolution in the Classification of Mental Illness*, 41 J. HIST. BEHAV. SCI. 249, 258–59 (2005)).

363. Gender dysphoria is “psychological distress that results from an incongruence between one’s sex assigned at birth and one’s gender identity.” *What is Gender Dysphoria?*, AM. PSYCHIATRIC ASS’N (Nov. 2020), <https://perma.cc/QBR7-A8DX>.

and transvestic disorder<sup>364</sup> are still in the 2022 DSM;<sup>365</sup> however, the former may be useful in order to obtain insurance coverage for gender-affirming medical treatment.<sup>366</sup> Nevertheless, continuing to view these identities as mental illnesses has devastating effects on LGBTQIA+ youth.<sup>367</sup> Courts and legislatures are beginning to treat conversion therapy as either consumer fraud or as psychologically harmful to minors.<sup>368</sup> Twenty-three states and D.C. ban conversion therapy for minors and five states and one territory partially ban it.<sup>369</sup> Three states have prevented enforcement of conversion therapy bans, and one state prohibits local level conversion therapy bans.<sup>370</sup> In March 2025, however, the Kentucky legislature voted to protect conversion therapy for LGBTQIA+ youths.<sup>371</sup>

### 1. Consumer Fraud

On August 20, 2015, Illinois enacted Public Act 099-0411, also known as the Youth Mental Health Protection Act, which bans sexual orientation change efforts and amends the state's Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Practices Act.<sup>372</sup> It provides, in relevant part, that:

No person or entity may . . . employ any deception, fraud, false pretense, false promise, misrepresentation, or the concealment, suppression, or omission of any material fact in advertising or otherwise offering conversion therapy services in a manner that represents homosexuality as a mental disease, disorder, or illness. . . . A violation

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364. The term “transvestic disorder” has been criticized as deeply problematic and stigmatizing, and has even been used to justify anti-trans hate crimes and discrimination. Kayley Whalen, *(In)validating Transgender Identities: Progress and Trouble in the DSM-5*, NAT'L LGBTQ TASK FORCE, (Dec. 13, 2012), <https://perma.cc/8JAN-R4HV>. However, it is still listed as a diagnosis in the DSM; the diagnosis “states it does not apply to all individuals who dress as the opposite sex, even those who do so habitually.” It is only considered a disorder if “cross-dressing or thoughts of cross-dressing are always or often accompanied by sexual excitement.” Jack Drescher, Jack Pula, & Eric J. Yarbrough, *Expert Q&A: Gender Dysphoria*, AM. PSYCHIATRIC ASS'N, <https://perma.cc/YK4U-WQ3F>.

365. See generally AM. PSYCH. ASS'N, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5-TR ed. 2022)*; see also AM. PSYCH. ASS'N, *What Is Gender Dysphoria?*, <https://perma.cc/2CPD-QA3Y>.

366. Whalen, *supra* note 364.

367. See *Doe ex rel. Doe v. Governor of New Jersey*, 783 F.3d 150, 152–53 (3d Cir. 2015).

368. See *Conversion “Therapy” Laws*, MOVEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT, <https://perma.cc/97S2-8SG8>. See e.g., Youth Mental Health Protection Act, 405 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 48/25 (West, Westlaw through P.A. 103-1066 of the 2024 Reg. Sess.); CAL. BUS. & PROF. CODE § 865 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 1017 of 2024 Reg. Sess.); N.J. STAT. ANN. §§ 45:1–54, 55 (West, Westlaw through L.2024, c. 109 and J.R. No. 6.); OR. REV. STAT. ANN. § 675.850 (West, Westlaw through laws enacted in the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the 82d Leg. Assemb.); VT. STAT. ANN. tit. 18, § 8353 (West, Westlaw through Acts of Reg. Sess. of 2025–2026 Vt. Gen. Assemb. (2025) effective as of Feb. 27, 2025); D.C. CODE ANN. § 7-1231.14(a) (West, Westlaw through Jan. 5, 2025); see *infra* Section III.A.1–2.

369. *Conversion Therapy*, *supra* note 357.

370. *Id.*

371. Bruce Schreiner, *Kentucky GOP lawmakers vote to protect conversion therapy* (March 17, 2025), <https://perma.cc/7STE-6GZA>.

372. 405 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 48/25 (West, Westlaw through P.A. 103-1066 of the 2024 Reg. Sess.).

of [Section 25] constitutes an unlawful practice under the Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Business Practices Act.<sup>373</sup>

In its legislative findings, the Illinois General Assembly discussed at length<sup>374</sup> its conclusion that gay conversion therapy is both ineffective and incredibly detrimental to LGBTQIA+ youth.<sup>375</sup> Illinois was the fourth state to ban gay conversion therapy for people under the age of eighteen, but the first state to pass a law banning conversion therapy on the basis that it is consumer fraud.<sup>376</sup>

In a 2014 New Jersey case, plaintiffs engaged in “conversion therapy and counseling services” provided by defendants Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing (JONAH), “a nonprofit corporation dedicated to educating [individuals] about the social, cultural, and emotional factors that lead to same-sex attractions.”<sup>377</sup> The therapy provided by JONAH purported to “change plaintiffs’ sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual.”<sup>378</sup> Plaintiffs brought suit

373. *Id.*; see also Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Practices Act, 815 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 505/1 (West, Westlaw through P.A. 103-1066 of the 2024 Reg. Sess.).

374. H.B. 217, 2015 ILL. LEGIS. SERV. P.A. 99-411 (H.B. 217).

375. These findings are supported by: the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association Council on Scientific Affairs, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Counseling Association Governing Council, the American Psychoanalytic Association, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Pan American Health Organization. *Id.* The Illinois General Assembly cited the “Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation,” which was convened by the American Psychological Association. *Id.* The task force concluded that conversion therapy poses:

[C]ritical health risks to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, including confusion, depression, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, shame, social withdrawal, suicidality, substance abuse, stress, disappointment, self-blame, decreased self-esteem and authenticity to others, increased self-hatred, hostility and blame towards parents, feelings of anger and betrayal, loss of friends and potential romantic partners, problems in sexual and emotional intimacy, sexual dysfunction, high-risk sexual behaviors, a feeling of being dehumanized and untrue to self, a loss of faith, and a sense of having wasted time and resources.

*Id.* (citing *Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation*, AM. PSYCH. ASS’N (2009), <https://perma.cc/74V5-7L54>); see also SUBSTANCE ABUSE & MENTAL HEALTH SERVS. ADMIN., *supra* note 359.

376. See Mark Joseph Stern, *Illinois Bans Anti-Gay Conversion “Therapy” for Minors, Linking It to Consumer Fraud*, SLATE (Aug. 21, 2015), <https://perma.cc/VJ2X-3CJJ>; see also *Conversion “Therapy” Laws*, *supra* note 368 (reporting that twenty-two states and D.C. ban conversion therapy for minors and four states partially ban conversion therapy for minors by limiting state funds and regulating medical licenses); Sam Wolfe, *Illinois Law Banning Conversion Therapy Against LGBT Youth First to Contain ‘Consumer Fraud’ Provision*, ERIE GAY NEWS (Aug. 21, 2015), <https://perma.cc/7YD2-HM65>.

377. *Ferguson v. JONAH*, 136 A.3d 447 (N.J. Super. L. Div. 2014). One plaintiff alleged that during a private session with a particular counselor, he was required “to say one negative thing about himself, remove an article of clothing, then repeat the process.’ [He] submitted to [the] instructions until he was naked, when [the counselor] directed [him] ‘to touch his penis and then his buttocks.’” *Id.* at 450. Clients were also told “to spend more time at the gym and to be naked with their fathers at bathhouses.” *Id.* One plaintiff was told “to wear a rubber band on his wrist and snap it each time he felt attracted to another man.” *Id.* JONAH also “told plaintiffs that homosexuality is loathsome and that homosexuals are more susceptible to loneliness, suicidal thoughts, and contracting HIV/AIDS.” *Id.* at 451.

378. *Id.* at 450. The defendant organization “believes that homosexuality is a ‘learned behavior’ that can be reduced or eliminated through psychological and spiritual help.” *Id.* at 454.

against JONAH, claiming that the organization’s “business practices violate[d] the New Jersey Consumer Fraud Act . . . by misrepresenting that homosexuality is a mental illness or disorder and that JONAH’s therapy program is effective in changing the sexual orientation of clients.”<sup>379</sup> The Third Circuit found that each of JONAH’s “experts based their conclusions on the initial false premise that homosexuality is either abnormal or a mental disorder,” and that the “overwhelming weight of scientific authority concluded that homosexuality is not a disorder or abnormal . . . [and therefore] any expert opinion based on the initial premise that homosexuality is a mental disorder or abnormal is unreliable and likewise barred.”<sup>380</sup>

## 2. Bans Based on Psychological Harm to Minors

The Third<sup>381</sup> and Ninth<sup>382</sup> Circuits have each upheld the constitutionality of state laws that ban the provision of gay conversion therapy to LGBTQIA+ youth.<sup>383</sup> In 2013, both California<sup>384</sup> and New Jersey<sup>385</sup> enacted legislation that

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379. *Id.* at 451 (citing N.J. STAT. ANN. §§ 56:8-1 to 56:8-20 (West, Westlaw through L. 2024, c. 109 and J.R. No. 1)). The legal claim was that JONAH:

[E]ngaged in ‘unconscionable commercial practice, deception, fraud, false pretense, false promise, and misrepresentation[.]’ by claiming that homosexuality is a mental disorder and, in the face of empirical evidence to the contrary, that same-sex attractions can be reduced or eliminated through therapy. . . . Additionally, they contend that JONAH advised them that if conversion therapy did not produce the promised results, the blame rested solely with the clients.

*Id.* at 451 (citation omitted).

380. *Ferguson v. JONAH*, No. HUD-L-5473-12, slip op. at 19 (N.J. Super. L. Div. Feb. 5, 2015).

381. *See Doe ex rel. Doe v. Governor of New Jersey*, 783 F.3d 150, 151 (3d Cir. 2015); *cert denied*, 577 U.S. 1137 (2016). This case was brought as a challenge to the validity of the New Jersey ban on gay conversion therapy, which is codified at N.J. Stat. Ann. §§ 45:1-54, 55. 783 F.3d at 151–52, n.2 (citing N.J. STAT. ANN. §§ 45:1–54, 55 (West, Westlaw through L. 2024, c. 109 and J.R. No. 6)).

382. *See Pickup v. Brown*, 740 F.3d 1208, 1363 (9th Cir. 2013), *cert. denied*, 573 U.S. 945 (2014), *cert. denied sub nom. Welch v. Brown*, 573 U.S. 945 (2014). This case was brought as a challenge to the constitutional validity of the California ban on gay conversion therapy, as codified in CAL. BUS. & PROF. CODE §§ 865.1–865.2 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 1 of 2023-24 2d Ex. Sess. and all laws through Ch. 1017 of 2024 Reg. Sess.).

383. Oregon and D.C. have also enacted bans on gay conversion therapy for minors. Effective May 18, 2015, Oregon’s ban provides that a “mental health care or social health professional may not practice conversion therapy if the recipient of the conversion therapy is under 18 years of age.” OR. REV. STAT. ANN. § 675.850 (West, Westlaw through laws of the 2024 Reg. Sess. of the 82d Legis. Assemb.). Effective Mar. 11, 2015, the D.C. ban provides that a “provider shall not engage in sexual orientation change efforts with a consumer who is a minor,” and that violation of this law “shall be considered a failure to conform to acceptable conduct within the mental health profession under § 3-1205.14(a)(26), and shall subject a provider to discipline and penalties under § 3-1205.14(c).” D.C. CODE ANN. § 7-1231.14a (West, Westlaw through Jan. 5, 2025).

384. *See* BUS. & PROF. §§ 865.1–865.2. The California Act provides that “[u]nder no circumstances shall a mental health provider engage in sexual orientation change efforts with a patient under 18 years of age.” *Id.* § 865.1. The Act also provides that “[a]ny sexual orientation change efforts attempted on a patient under 18 years of age by a mental health provider shall be considered unprofessional conduct and shall subject a mental health provider to discipline by the licensing entity for that mental health provider.” *Id.* § 865.2.

385. *See* § 45:1-54.

prohibits mental health providers from engaging in any sexual orientation change efforts with persons under the age of eighteen. Each of these state legislatures found that being “lesbian, gay, or bisexual is not a disease, disorder, illness, deficiency, or shortcoming,”<sup>386</sup> and in declaring the intent of the acts, cited the American Psychological Association’s conclusion that “sexual orientation change efforts can pose critical health risks to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.”<sup>387</sup> The New Jersey ban also established that the state “has a compelling interest in protecting the physical and psychological well-being of minors, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth, and in protecting its minors against exposure to serious harms caused by sexual orientation change efforts.”<sup>388</sup>

In *Doe ex. rel. Doe v. Governor of New Jersey*, a minor who sought to undergo a sexual orientation change, together with his parents, challenged the constitutional validity of the New Jersey ban on gay conversion therapy.<sup>389</sup> When deciding this case, the Third Circuit discussed a similar case, *King v. Governor of New Jersey*, in which licensed counselors challenged the constitutionality of the gay conversion therapy ban.<sup>390</sup> The court upheld *King*’s reasoning.<sup>391</sup>

[The Act] survived intermediate scrutiny and was a “permissible prohibition of professional speech” [since the state of New Jersey had] an “unquestionably substantial” interest in protecting citizens from harmful professional practices, and that this interest is even stronger where the citizens protected are minors, “a population that is especially vulnerable to such practices.”<sup>392</sup>

The Third Circuit also agreed with the Ninth Circuit’s reasoning in *Pickup v. Brown*,<sup>393</sup> a case involving a challenge to California’s statute prohibiting sexual orientation change efforts counseling to minors.<sup>394</sup> In *Pickup*, the Ninth Circuit

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386. *Id.*; see also Sexual Orientation Change Efforts Act, Cal. S.B. 1172; BUS. & PROF. §§ 865.1–865.2.

387. See Cal. S.B. 1172 (codified at BUS. PROF. § 865.1); § 45:1-54.

388. § 45:1-54.

389. *Doe*, 783 F.3d at 154.

390. *Id.* at 151 (citing *King v. Governor of New Jersey*, 767 F.3d 216 (3d Cir. 2014)).

391. The court in *King* stated that the ban could be “permissible only if it directly advances the State’s substantial interest in protecting clients from ineffective or harmful professional services, and is not more extensive than necessary to serve that interest.” *Id.* at 153 (citing *King*, 767 F.3d at 235).

392. *Id.* at 153 (citations omitted). For a scholarly discussion of the intermediate scrutiny standard, see also Patrick Bannon, Note, *Intermediate Scrutiny vs. the “Labeling Game” Approach: King v. Governor of New Jersey and the Benefits of Applying Heightened Scrutiny to Professional Speech*, 23 J. L. & POL’Y 649, 678–87 (2015); David Friedman, Note, *The Right to Stay Gay: SB 1172 and SOCE*, 25 STAN. L. & POL’Y REV. 193, 197 (2014). But see Jessica Clarke, *Scrutinizing Sex*, 92.1 U. CHI. L. REV. 2, 2-14 (2025) (arguing for strict scrutiny for sex discrimination because sex, like race, is an imprecise category).

393. *Pickup v. Brown*, 740 F.3d 1208, 1223 (9th Cir. 2013).

394. *Doe*, 783 F.3d at 156.

held that the California ban was “rationally related to the legitimate government interest of protecting the well-being of minors.”<sup>395</sup>

#### B. CHILD CUSTODY ISSUES FOR LGBTQIA+-AFFIRMING PARENTS

As LGBTQIA+ youth come out at younger ages,<sup>396</sup> “courts will increasingly face custody disputes where divorcing parents disagree about the desirability of their child’s emerging sexual orientation or gender identity and expression.”<sup>397</sup> However, courts have yet to determine the proper way to take a child’s sexual identity into account to best serve the unique interests and circumstances of LGBTQIA+ youth.

The “best interests of the child” standard is the primary guiding principle for courts in determining the outcomes of custody hearings.<sup>398</sup> It is inherently subjective and provides judges with broad discretion to determine which living arrangement is most desirable for the child long-term.<sup>399</sup> Thus, a fact-finder may misinterpret or misunderstand LGBTQIA+ youths’ gender identity and sexual orientation in custody determinations, or may assign custody to the parent whose view regarding gender identity and sexual orientation most closely aligns with the factfinder’s own.<sup>400</sup>

Judges are not permitted to consider society’s possible negative reaction to race, ethnicity, religion, or gender in determining the best interests of a child.<sup>401</sup> In addition, scholars argue that *Lawrence v. Texas* requires equal treatment of youth in custody proceedings.<sup>402</sup> However, there is a need for greater understanding of gender identity, sexual orientation, and the interests of LGBTQIA+ youth in custody proceedings.<sup>403</sup>

395. *Pickup*, 740 F.3d at 1232; see also *Welch v. Brown*, 834 F.3d 1041, 1044 (9th Cir. 2016).

396. The Trevor Project, Research Brief: Age of Sexual Orientation Outness and Suicide Risk 1 (2022), available at <https://perma.cc/PHW3-5X4T>.

397. Matthew J. Hulstein, Commentary, *Recognizing and Respecting the Rights of LGBT Youth in Child Custody Proceedings*, 27 BERKELEY J. GENDER L. & JUST. 171, 173 (2012).

398. Debra Schoenberg, *The Best Interests of the Child—Understanding the standard in custody cases* (2022), <https://perma.cc/597Z-F7AB>.

399. Hulstein, *supra* note 397, at 174.

400. *Id.* at 190; see also *Smith v. Smith*, No. 05 JE 42, 2007 WL 901599, at \*12 (Ohio Ct. App. Mar. 23, 2007) (upholding a lower court’s finding, without medical diagnosis, that the child did not suffer from GID and was rather influenced by the mother to believe that he was transgender).

401. See *Palmore v. Sidoti*, 466 U.S. 429, 433 (1984).

402. As one scholar stated:

Although the facts in *Lawrence* concerned a criminal statute that prohibited same sex couples from engaging in consensual sex acts in private, the right articulated in the case goes well beyond such facts. . . . Ultimately, the *Lawrence* opinion protects “the right of gay people to equal respect for their life choices.”

Hulstein, *supra* note 397, at 185–86 (citing *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558, 567 (2003)).

403. Natalia Ramos, Elizabeth Barnert, & Eraka Bath, *Addressing the Mental Health Needs of LGBTQ Youth in the Juvenile Justice System*, J AM. ACAD. CHILD ADOLESC. PSYCHIATRY 61(2), 115–119, 119 (2022).

For example, in *Smith v. Smith*, an Ohio court awarded custody to the estranged father of Christine, a child who was born male but sought treatment for gender identity disorder (GID) with the support of her mother.<sup>404</sup> Although Christine's mother had previously been given residential custody, her father was awarded sole custody when he protested Christine's transition and claimed that being treated as if she were a boy was in Christine's best interests.<sup>405</sup> In addition to granting custody to the father, the court issued an order requiring Christine be treated as if she were a boy.<sup>406</sup> The Ohio Court of Appeals affirmed the trial court's decision, but noted that the case revealed "some of the severe limitations in using the judicial system to resolve complex and possibly controversial child-rearing and childhood mental health issues."<sup>407</sup>

Additionally, attorneys representing LGBTQIA+ youth are not immune to personal biases, homophobia, and transphobia, and the lack of a "zealous advocate" may negatively affect custody determinations.<sup>408</sup> Scholars and advocates insist that both judges and attorneys approach custody proceedings with an understanding of the needs of minors who identify with the LGBTQIA+ community.<sup>409</sup>

### C. HOMELESSNESS AMONG LGBTQIA+ YOUTH AND RELATED ISSUES

Children and teenagers who identify as LGBTQIA+ are 120% more likely to experience homelessness than heterosexual and cisgender youth.<sup>410</sup> Studies estimate that more than 4.2 million youths in the U.S. are currently experiencing some form of homelessness,<sup>411</sup> with up to 40% identifying as LGBTQIA+.<sup>412</sup> Within this population, youth of color are overrepresented: 44% of Native/Indigenous LGBTQIA+ youth have experienced homeless or housing instability during their life.<sup>413</sup> Studies have also shown that transgender and gender nonconforming youth are at an especially high risk of homelessness.<sup>414</sup> Homeless LGBTQIA+ youth also have more

404. *Smith*, 2007 WL 901599 at \*2–6.

405. *Id.* at \*1–2.

406. *Id.* at \*5.

407. *Id.* at \*12.

408. See Sarah Valentine, *When Your Attorney is Your Enemy: Preliminary Thoughts on Ensuring Effective Representation For Queer Youth*, 19 COLUM. J. GENDER & L. 773, 775–76 (2010); see also *Bias in the Courtroom*, DEATH PENALTY INFORMATION CTR., <https://perma.cc/3CCR-59T2>.

409. *Id.*

410. *Policy Brief: LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness*, NAT'L NETWORK FOR YOUTH 1 (Spring 2023) <https://perma.cc/L7ZM-6CS2>.

411. M.H. Morton, A. Dworsky, & G.M. Samuels, *Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America*, VOICES OF YOUTH COUNT 1 (Apr. 2018), <https://perma.cc/D5ZF-42BL>.

412. *Policy Brief: LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness*, *supra* note 410, at 1.

413. *Homelessness and Housing Instability Among LGBTQ Youth*, TREVOR PROJECT 4, 11 (Nov. 23, 2021), <https://perma.cc/5NNM-UL9K>. In comparison, 27% of white LGBTQ youth have experienced homelessness or housing instability during their life. *Id.*

414. *Id.* at 4 ("Homelessness and housing instability were reported at higher rates among transgender and nonbinary youth, including 38% of transgender girls/women, 39% of transgender boys/men, and 35% of nonbinary youth, compared to 23% of cisgender LGBTQ youth.").

barriers to accessing services and are more likely to have experienced trauma than non-LGBTQIA+ homeless youth.<sup>415</sup>

This section examines the primary reasons why LGBTQIA+ youth become homeless and the specific barriers to exiting homelessness that they experience. It also summarizes the initiatives and legal remedies that have been proposed.

### 1. Primary Causes

Familial rejection is cited as the primary cause of homelessness among LGBTQIA+ youth.<sup>416</sup> In 2015, 55% of homeless lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer youth and 67% of homeless transgender youth reported that they were homeless because they were “forced out by [their] parents [or] ran away because of SOGIE [Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression].”<sup>417</sup>

Additionally, LGBTQIA+ youth are more likely to experience emotional, physical, and sexual abuse while in foster care, a potential alternative to homelessness for youth.<sup>418</sup> State custody facilities, such as juvenile correctional facilities, have been found liable for allowing harassment and abuse of LGBTQIA+ youth to persist despite their duty to protect the welfare of the minors in their charge.<sup>419</sup>

### 2. LGBTQIA+ Youth-Specific Difficulties

LGBTQIA+ youth, on average, experience homelessness and housing insecurity for longer periods of time than heterosexual and cisgender youth.<sup>420</sup> This is likely due to the many barriers that LGBTQIA+ youth face when exiting homelessness, like lack of family acceptance, lack of a support system, and lack of funding for LGBTQIA+-specific programs for housing providers.<sup>421</sup> Transgender youth often experience difficulty in securing placement in gender-segregated accommodations or are placed in accommodations at odds with their gender identity.<sup>422</sup> Further, the transgender community faces

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415. *Id.* at 15–17.

416. Soon Kyu Choi, Bianca D.M. Wilson, Jama Shelton, & Gary J. Gates, *Serving Our Youth 2015: The Needs and Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth Experiencing Homelessness*, UCLA SCH. OF L. WILLIAMS INST. 5 (June 2015).

417. *Id.*; see also Maureen Carroll, Comment, *Transgender Youth, Adolescent Decisionmaking, and Roper v. Simmons*, 56 UCLA L. REV. 725, 734 (2009) (“Transgender adolescents must navigate a hostile world with little familial or institutional support.”).

418. See Jason Schaub, Willem J. Stander, & Paul Montgomery, *LGBTQ+ Young People’s Health and Well-Being Experiences in Out-of-home Social Care: A Scoping Review*, 143 CHILDREN & YOUTH SERV. REV. 1, 5–11 (2022).

419. See *R.G. v. Koller*, 415 F. Supp. 2d 1129, 1156 (D. Haw. 2006) (holding that a facility that allowed pervasive abuse to LGBTQIA+ plaintiffs violated their due process rights).

420. Choi, Wilson, Shelton, & Gates, *supra* note 416, at 4 (noting that 61% of LGB and 80% of transgender youth were homeless for longer periods of time than non-LGBT youth according to providers interviewed).

421. See *id.* at 12.

422. See, e.g., Janie Kelley, Annie Pullen Sansfaçon, Morgane A. Gelly, Lyne Chiniara, & Nicholas Chadi, *School Factors Strongly Impact Transgender and Non-Binary Youths’ Well-Being*, 9 CHILDREN 1520 (2022).

difficulties in securing housing. One in five transgender people have been refused a home, and more than one in ten have been evicted because of their gender identity.<sup>423</sup>

LGBTQIA+ youth are especially vulnerable to violence and harassment while experiencing homelessness.<sup>424</sup> Among homeless lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth, 70% reported harassment and bullying, while 60% also reported physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.<sup>425</sup> Transgender youth experienced even higher rates of violence while homeless: 90% reported harassment and bullying, and 75% experienced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.<sup>426</sup> Ten percent of homeless LGB youth and 20% of homeless transgender youth reported having been sexually exploited or trafficked.<sup>427</sup>

In addition to physical traumas associated with housing insecurity, LGBTQIA+ youth experience a great deal of emotional and mental harm.<sup>428</sup> Sixty-five percent of homeless LGB youth and 75% of homeless transgender and gender nonconforming youth identified as having mental health issues.<sup>429</sup> Thirty-five percent of homeless LGB youth reported abusing alcohol or other substances; 40% of their transgender counterparts reported substance abuse.<sup>430</sup>

Societal factors such as anti-trans laws, police bias, and discriminatory bail practices contribute to higher rates of incarceration for LGBTQIA+ youth,<sup>431</sup> which further exacerbates barriers to housing security.<sup>432</sup> Fifteen percent of LGB and 20% of transgender youth surveyed in 2014 reported having some interaction with the juvenile or criminal justice system.<sup>433</sup> Some of this interaction, however, may have been the result of discriminatory enforcement of laws: LGBTQIA+ youth experiencing homelessness are easily targeted for minor “quality of life” crimes such as loitering, public drunkenness, and littering.<sup>434</sup> Moreover, like many people experiencing homelessness, LGBTQIA+ youth are often forced to

423. MOVEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT, NAT’L ASS’N FOR TRANSGENDER EQUAL., TRANSGENDER L. CTR., & GLAAD, UNDERSTANDING ISSUES FACING TRANSGENDER AMERICANS 4 (2015).

424. See Choi, Wilson, Shelton, & Gates, *supra* note 416, at 5.

425. *Id.*

426. *Id.*

427. *Id.* at 5.

428. See *id.*

429. Choi, Wilson, Shelton, & Gates, *supra* note 416, at 5.

430. *Id.*

431. EMMA STAMMEN & NAZGOL GHANDOOSH, SENT’G PROJECT, INCARCERATED LGBTQ+ ADULTS AND YOUTH 5 (2022), <https://perma.cc/ZTN2-B59N>.

432. Lucius Couloute, *Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people*, PRISON POL’Y INITIATIVE (Aug. 2018), <https://perma.cc/992S-EZA7> (noting that “formerly incarcerated people are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public”).

433. Choi, Wilson, Shelton, & Gates, *supra* note 416, at 5.

434. Lilly Yu, *LGBTQ youth locked in a cycle between the justice system and the streets*, URBAN INST. (Oct. 1, 2015), <https://perma.cc/S9MV-V35N>. See generally Brenner M. Fissell, *Police-Made Law*, 108 MINN. L. REV. 2561, 2578 (2024) (defining quality-of-life offenses as “crimes that cover low-level street behavior that will only rarely be prosecuted, but that often serve as a convenient basis for an arrest and, perhaps, a search. Such crimes make policing cheaper, because they permit searches and arrests with less investigative work.”).

resort to “survival crimes,” such as commercial sexual activity or minor theft, in order to survive on the streets and meet basic needs.<sup>435</sup>

### 3. Proposed Legal Solutions

A number of legal solutions have been proposed to address the epidemic of homelessness among LGBTQIA+ youth, focused on increasing monetary support and care for youth who too often fall between the cracks.<sup>436</sup>

*a. Child Support and Emancipation.* Deborah Lolai argues that LGBTQIA+ youth who are experiencing homelessness should petition their parents for child support.<sup>437</sup> Lolai discusses the possible positive effects of granting these petitions—namely, reducing homelessness, enabling youth employment, and minimizing interactions with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.<sup>438</sup> She admits, however, that the potentially harmful effects of such petitions may include the deterioration of the parent-child relationship, an infringement of parents’ rights, and contribution to the prison-industrial complex.<sup>439</sup>

Other organizations, such as True Colors United and the National Homelessness Law Center, call on states to codify their emancipation processes, thereby making it easier for youth to emancipate themselves.<sup>440</sup> Although an emancipated youth is no longer eligible to receive child support,<sup>441</sup> emancipation allows youths to access housing programs without parental, child welfare system, or law enforcement involvement; sign leases; apply for and directly receive food assistance, through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, health insurance, and disability benefits; and apply for professional licenses, and keep any money earned from work.<sup>442</sup>

*b. Foster Care Reform.* Due to the high frequency of unsafe and abusive conditions for LGBTQIA+ youth, legal claims have been brought against foster care providers and agencies under multiple theories: the right to safety in the child welfare system,<sup>443</sup> the right to equal protection,<sup>444</sup> and freedom of expression.<sup>445</sup>

435. Carrie L. Buist, *LGBT Rights in the Fields of Criminal Law and Law Enforcement*, 54 U. RICH. L. REV. 877, 881–82 (2020); Rosalynn Erney & Kristen Weber, *Not all Children are Straight and White: Strategies for Serving Youth of Color in Out-of-Home Care who Identify as LGBTQ*, 96 CHILD WELFARE 151, 160–61 (2018); see also Yu, *supra* note 434.

436. See, e.g., Aleya Jones, Gabriela Sevilla, Katie Meyer Scott, & Jeremy Penn, *State Index on Youth Homelessness*, TRUE COLORS UNITED & NAT’L HOMELESSNESS L. CTR. 16 (2022), <https://perma.cc/T5QS-Z48Y>; *Policy Brief: LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness*, *supra* note 410, at 3; *Homelessness and Housing Instability Among LGBTQ Youth*, *supra* note 413, at 19–23.

437. Deborah Lolai, “You’re Going to be Straight or You’re Not Going to Live Here”: *Child Support for LGBT Homeless Youth*, 24 TUL. J.L. & SEXUALITY 35, 96 (2015).

438. *Id.* at 78–84.

439. *Id.* at 84–88.

440. Jones, Sevilla, Meyer Scott, & Penn, *supra* note 436, at 13, 16.

441. Lolai, *supra* note 437, at 62.

442. Jones, Sevilla, Meyer Scott, & Penn, *supra* note 436, at 13.

443. See, e.g., *Marisol A. v. Giuliani*, 185 F.R.D. 152, 167–70 (S.D.N.Y. 1999).

444. See, e.g., *Wyatt B. v. Brown*, No. 6:19-cv-00556-AA, 2021 WL 4434011 (Or. Sept. 27, 2021).

445. See, e.g., *Doe v. Bell*, 754 N.Y.S.2d 846, 848 (Sup. Ct. 2003).

However, some states still have laws permitting child welfare agencies and foster parents to discriminate against LGBTQIA+ youth.<sup>446</sup> The Supreme Court's decision in *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, allowing religious social services groups to refuse to certify same-sex parents as foster parents on First Amendment grounds,<sup>447</sup> will also likely exacerbate harmful conditions by decreasing the number of qualified, affirming persons available to foster LGBTQIA+ children.<sup>448</sup>

Recognizing these systemic issues and in light of *Fulton*, many organizations and scholars have published model standards and best practices for child welfare laws, agencies, employees, and participants.<sup>449</sup> They include establishing regularly updated training curriculum for staff, creating non-discrimination policies that address intersectionality, demonstrating inclusive behavior, and respecting confidentiality.<sup>450</sup>

*c. Prevention of Discrimination in Emergency Shelters and Permanent Housing.* The history of LGBTQIA+ discrimination in emergency housing<sup>451</sup> illustrates the need for more adequate funding of LGBTQIA+-specific services in homeless and domestic violence shelters.<sup>452</sup> Multiple organizations, starting with the Child Welfare League of America, have published suggestions of “best practices” for

446. Cathryn Oakley, *Disregarding the Best Interest of the Child: Licenses to Discriminate in Child Welfare Services* HUM. RTS. CAMPAIGN 8–10 (2020) (citing Tex. Hum. Res. Code Ann. § 45.005 (West, Westlaw through 2023 Reg., 2d, 3d and 4th Called Sess. of the 88th Leg., and the Nov. 7, 2023 gen. election), Miss. Code Ann. § 11-62-5 (West, Westlaw through 2024 Reg., 1st, and 2d Extra. Sess. effective through July 1, 2024), and S.D. Codified Laws § 26-6-38 (West, Westlaw through 2025 Reg. Sess., and Supreme Court Rule 25-16)). *But see* CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE §§ 16001.9(a)(4), (17)–(19), (22)(A) (West, Westlaw through Ch. 1 of 2023-24 2d Extra. Sess. and all laws through Ch. 1017 of 2024 Reg. Sess.) (establishing protections for LGBTQ+ foster children, including guaranteeing access to gender-affirming care).

447. *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, 141 S. Ct. 1868, 1871–73 (2021).

448. Oakley, *supra* note 446, at 4, 12 (“An estimated 2 million LGBTQ adults are interested in adoption.” Further, “it certainly isn’t in the best interest of an LGBTQ child to be denied medical treatment, or subjected to abusive discredited practices because the host family or child welfare agency wants to change a child’s LGBTQ identity.”); *see also* Aryn Fields, *The Human Rights Campaign Reacts to Supreme Court Decision in Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, HUM. RTS. CAMPAIGN (June 17, 2021), <https://perma.cc/9JKT-S38R>.

449. *See, e.g.*, Erney & Weber, *supra* note 435, at 165–74; *Supporting Your LGBTQ+ Youth: A Guide for Foster Parents*, CHILD WELFARE INFO. GATEWAY & CHILDREN’S BUREAU 1–11 (June 2021), <https://perma.cc/L5GU-GBHN>; Lisa E. Cox, Terrie Fritz, Virma Little, Shirley Otis-Green, & Anthony Yamamoto, *NASW Standards for Social Work Practice in Child Welfare*, NAT’L ASS’N OF SOCIAL WORKERS (2013), <https://perma.cc/3VF4-MRSQ>.

450. Erney & Weber, *supra* note 435, at 165–74; *Supporting Your LGBTQ+ Youth: A Guide for Foster Parents*, *supra* note 449, at 6–7, 10; Shannan Wilber, Caitlin Ryan, & Jody Marksamer, *CWLA Best Practice Guidelines: Serving LGBT Youth in Out-of-Home Care*, CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AM. 37–38 (2006).

451. “Emergency shelters” are defined as facilities whose primary purpose is “to provide a temporary shelter for the homeless in general or for specific populations of the homeless and which does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements.” 24 C.F.R. § 576.2 (West, Westlaw through Mar. 13, 2025, 90 FR 11905).

452. *See Policy Brief: LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness*, *supra* note 410, at 1, 3 (noting LGBTQ+ youth are less likely to stay in a shelter than their straight, cisgender peers).

administrators of emergency and long-term shelters aimed at changing cultures of discrimination against and promoting equal acceptance of LGBTQIA+ youth.<sup>453</sup>

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) enacted the Equal Access Rule, mostly prohibiting HUD facilities from discriminating against people on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>454</sup> In 2016, the Rule was amended to require individuals be placed and accommodated in HUD facilities in accordance with their gender identity, explicitly defined as “the gender with which a person identifies, regardless of the sex assigned to that person at birth and the person’s perceived gender identity . . . [including] the gender identified on an individual’s identity documents.”<sup>455</sup> Despite these advances, advocates say HUD needs stricter enforcement mechanisms for the Rule in order to truly take advantage of its protections.<sup>456</sup> In 2024, the HUD Secretary under the Trump Administration directed its staff to “halt any pending or future enforcement actions related to the 2016 Equal Access Rule.”<sup>457</sup> The Secretary argued that the 2016 Rule “tied housing programs, shelters, and other facilities funded by HUD to far-left gender ideology.”<sup>458</sup>

While federal protection against housing discrimination for LGBTQIA+ Americans has been historically scarce, in February 2021, HUD, then under the Biden Administration, announced that it would enforce the Fair Housing Act to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>459</sup> The Agency’s new interpretation of the Fair Housing Act stems from the Supreme Court’s decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, which held that an employer who fires an individual for being gay or transgender violates the

453. See, e.g., Wilber, Ryan, & Marksamer, *supra* note 450, at 47–51; *Policy Brief: LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness*, *supra* note 410, at 3; *Homelessness and Housing Instability Among LGBTQ Youth*, *supra* note 413, at 20–21.

454. 24 C.F.R. § 5.105(a)(2) (West, Westlaw through Mar. 13, 2025, 90 FR 11905); Equal Access to Housing in HUD Programs Regardless of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity [2012 Equal Access Rule], 77 Fed. Reg. 5662 (Feb. 3, 2012). *But see* 2012 Equal Access Rule, 77 Fed. Reg. at 5663, 5666 (permitting “inquiries as to sex” for the purpose of “determining eligibility for a temporary, emergency shelter that is limited to one sex because it has shared sleeping areas and/or bathrooms”).

455. 24 C.F.R. § 5.106 (West, Westlaw through Mar. 13, 2025, 90 FR 11905); Equal Access in Accordance With an Individual’s Gender Identity in Community Planning and Development Programs, 81 Fed. Reg. 64763, 64766 (Sept. 21, 2016). The amended Rule also specifies that providers’ policies and procedures may not isolate or segregate transgender or gender nonconforming occupants, including policies and procedures designed to address harassment and discrimination towards them. Equal Access in Accordance With an Individual’s Gender Identity in Community Planning and Development Programs, 81 Fed. Reg. at 64768.

456. See *Homelessness and Housing Instability Among LGBTQ Youth*, *supra* note 410, at 21 (noting LGBTQ youth, especially transgender youth, are still vulnerable to discrimination and harassment at many shelters and housing facilities).

457. *Secretary Scott Turner Halts Enforcement Actions of HUD’s Gender Identity Rule*, U.S. DEP’T OF HOUSING & URB. DEV. (Feb. 10, 2025), <https://perma.cc/J5T4-Q77F>.

458. *Id.*

459. *HUD to Enforce Fair Housing Act to Prohibit Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, U.S. DEP’T OF HOUSING & URB. DEV. (Feb. 11, 2021), <https://perma.cc/7533-WXMA>.

prohibition against sex discrimination in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>460</sup>

Currently, only twenty-two states and D.C. have laws explicitly prohibiting housing discrimination based on both sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>461</sup> Eight more states interpret existing prohibitions on sex discrimination to include sexual orientation and/or gender identity, but do not explicitly enumerate sexual orientation or gender identity in their nondiscrimination laws.<sup>462</sup> Two other states prohibit housing discrimination based on sexual orientation, but offer no protections for gender identity.<sup>463</sup> To remedy these national inconsistencies, the Fair and Equal Housing Act was reintroduced in the House of Representatives on June 27, 2023.<sup>464</sup> The Act would provide explicit non-discrimination protections for LGBTQIA+ Americans in housing by “adding ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘gender identity’ as protected characteristics under the Fair Housing Act,” codifying HUD’s current enforcement policy.<sup>465</sup> However, this bill has not yet been reintroduced in the Senate.<sup>466</sup>

*d. Access to Medical Treatment.* Transgender people face significant barriers to health care access<sup>467</sup> and are among the most stigmatized and medically underserved groups.<sup>468</sup> Transgender people have a particularly acute interest in safe and accessible health care because they are dependent on gender-affirming

460. *Bostock v. Clayton Cnty.*, 140 S. Ct. 1731, 1737 (2020).

461. See *Equality Maps: Housing Nondiscrimination Laws*, MOVEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT, <https://perma.cc/73MS-2M6U> (noting that California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and D.C. explicitly prohibit discrimination based on both sexual orientation and gender identity).

462. *Id.* (noting that Arizona, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, and Pennsylvania do not explicitly enumerate sexual orientation or gender identity in their nondiscrimination laws).

463. *Id.* (noting that Iowa and Wisconsin state law explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation only).

464. See *Fair and Equal Housing Act*, HUM. RTS. CAMPAIGN, <https://perma.cc/LEW7-6K4C>.

465. *Id.*

466. *Id.*

467. These obstacles include professionals’ bias and lack of general knowledge about best practices, as well as the failure of many health insurance plans to cover the cost of hormone therapy and supplies, mental health services, or gender affirmation surgery, and restrictions on care imposed by prohibitive health care systems. “One in four respondents to the Transgender Discrimination Survey had experienced insurance coverage obstacles, such as coverage denials for care related to gender transition or routine care. More than half (55%) had been denied coverage for transition-related surgery, and 25% were denied coverage for hormone therapy. These barriers exist despite evidence that such interventions are safe, effective, and medically necessary.” AM. COLL. OF OBSTETRICIANS & GYNECOLOGISTS, COMM. OP. NO. 823, HEALTH CARE FOR TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DIVERSE INDIVIDUALS 78 (2021), <https://perma.cc/6QDN-G5ZV> (citation omitted). Furthermore, these treatments are very expensive: puberty blockers, for example, cost “approximately \$1,200 per month for injections and can range from \$4,500 to \$18,000 for an implant.” Priyanka Boghani, *When Transgender Kids Transition, Medical Risks are Both Known and Unknown*, PBS (June 30, 2015), <https://perma.cc/7PYU-N363>.

468. Caroline Medina, Thee Santos, & Lindsay Mahowald, *Protecting and Advancing Healthcare for Transgender Adult Communities*, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS (Aug., 18, 2021), <https://perma.cc/F64E-HLYK>.

medical care to realize their identities and to live authentic, mentally and physically healthy lives.<sup>469</sup> For transgender youth, this need to access medical care is exacerbated by the fact that the U.S. has not “developed jurisprudence or legislation that explicitly protects adolescents’ capacity to consent to gender reassignment treatment.”<sup>470</sup> However, the lack of established case law may be mitigated by regulatory developments, discussed below.

i. Hormone Replacement Therapy and Gender Affirmation Surgeries. Doctors have found hormone therapy to be medically necessary for many people.<sup>471</sup> Transgender adolescents often have difficulty obtaining hormones due to “barriers imposed by the medical establishment and the legal system.”<sup>472</sup> Additionally, “individuals concerned about the way they may be treated by a health care professional are more likely to obtain hormones from friends or unlicensed sources, putting the mat risk of inappropriate dosing and the subsequent [after effects]”<sup>473</sup> threatening the adolescent transgender community’s safety and well-being.

Medicaid rules in twenty-seven states, Puerto Rico, and D.C. have chosen to specifically include coverage for gender-affirming care.<sup>474</sup> Developments as recent as early 2023, including a rule finalized by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office for Civil Rights regarding anti-discrimination, seem promising for the future of transgender youth.<sup>475</sup> However, certain medical uncertainties, such as the timing of gender-affirming hormone treatment to transgender minors, still need to be addressed.<sup>476</sup> The issue of timing will only gain

469. Kristie L. Seelman, Matthew J.P. Colón-Díaz, Rebecca H. LeCroix, Marik Xavier-Brier, & Leonardo Kattari, *Transgender Noninclusive Healthcare and Delaying Care Because of Fear: Connections to General Health And Mental Health Among Transgender Adults*, 2 *TRANSGENER HEALTH* 17 (Feb. 2017).

470. “According to [Professor] Kimberly Mutcherson, in one study, American health care providers reported that adolescent patients ‘understand information about medical treatment and conditions, engage in rational deliberation during the decisional process, and communicate choices and concerns clearly.’” Katherine Romero & Rebecca Reingold, *Advancing Adolescent Capacity to Consent to Transgender-Related Health Care in Colombia and the USA*, 21 *REPROD. HEALTH MATTERS*, 186, 193 (2013) (citing Kimberly M. Mutcherson, *Whose Body Is It Anyway? An Updated Model of Healthcare Decision-making Rights for Adolescents*, 14 *CORNELL J.L. & PUB. POL’Y* 251, 257–85 (2005)); see also Carroll, *supra* note 417, at 732 (“[Because] the parents of transgender youth are often hostile or absent, the parental consent requirement imposed by informed consent laws adds to these barriers.”).

471. *FAQ: Equal Access to Health Care*, LAMBDA LEGAL, <https://perma.cc/LH3X-JLLR>.

472. Carroll, *supra* note 417, at 732.

473. *Committee Opinion No. 823, Health Care for Transgender and Gender Diverse Individuals*, *supra* note 467, at 79.

474. *Equality Maps: Medicaid Coverage of Transgender-Related Health Care*, MOVEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT, <https://perma.cc/84XV-K5N2>.

475. See 45 C.F.R. § 92.1 (West, Westlaw through Mar. 14, 2025, 90 FR 12114).

476. “Doctors grapple with when to start cross-sex hormones . . . . While the Endocrine Society’s guidelines suggest 16, more and more children are starting hormones at 13 or 14 once their doctors, therapists and families have agreed that they are mentally and emotionally prepared.” Boghani, *supra* note 467. The decision to try to start hormone treatment earlier in life is due to “concerns over the impact that delaying puberty for too long can have on development, physically, emotionally and socially. The physical changes that hormones bring about are irreversible, making the decision more weighty than taking puberty blockers.” *Id.*

importance as trans people are increasingly able to seek and obtain gender affirmation at younger ages.<sup>477</sup>

#### IV. CHALLENGES FACING LGBTQIA+ YOUTH IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

##### A. THE PREVALENCE OF LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

LGBTQIA+ youth are at high risk of ending up in the juvenile justice system.<sup>478</sup> Many are “pushed towards criminalized behaviors such as drug sales, theft, or survival sex” in order to get by after fleeing abuse at home.<sup>479</sup> A 2021 report showed that while LGBTQ youth make up 9.5% of all youth nationwide, they account for 20% of those currently in the juvenile system.<sup>480</sup> Given this disparity and the overrepresentation of LGBTQIA+ youth in the system,<sup>481</sup> it is important to discuss the challenges these youths face while detained. The following sections will discuss the harassment LGBTQIA+ youth face, the challenges transgender youth confront, and, finally, how courts resolve allegations of abuse from LGBTQIA+ youth in the juvenile justice system.

##### B. HARASSMENT AND ABUSE OF LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

LGBTQIA+ youth in the juvenile justice system, like LGBTQIA+ youth in general, experience higher rates of abuse and harassment.<sup>482</sup> In a study mandated by the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), the DOJ found that LGBT and intersex individuals are particularly vulnerable to rape in prison settings.<sup>483</sup> Moreover, 12% of LGBTQIA+ youth reported sexual victimization in juvenile facilities—almost double the reported 6.5% for heterosexual juveniles.<sup>484</sup> In *R.G. v. Koller*, three plaintiffs (a boy “perceived to be gay,” a lesbian, and a transgender girl) filed suit for injunctive relief based on abuse and harassment they experienced from both other detainees and prison staff.<sup>485</sup> The court found that the other detainees and the prison staff verbally abused the plaintiffs because of the

477. Jae A. Puckett, *Trans youth are coming out and living in their gender much earlier than older generations*, THE CONVERSATION (Apr. 26, 2021), <https://perma.cc/XJ8A-GLZF> (“We found little difference between the generations in when they recognized that their gender felt different than their sex assigned at birth. . . . However, the boomers reported reaching the other major milestones [e.g., ‘living in their affirmed gender all the time’] later than younger groups.”).

478. Alexi Jones, *Visualizing the unequal treatment of LGBTQ people in the criminal justice system*, PRISON POL’Y INITIATIVE (Mar. 2, 2021), <https://perma.cc/7URV-7C5X>.

479. *Id.*

480. *Id.* See also *Unjust: LGBTQ Youth Incarcerated In the Juvenile Justice System*, MOVEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT 2 (June 2017), <https://perma.cc/6V8U-XQMQ>.

481. Jones, *supra* note 478.

482. *Id.*

483. *Committing to Safety and Respect for LGBTI Youth and Adults in Confinement: Lessons From Two Agencies*, NAT’L PREA RESOURCE CTR. (2024), <https://perma.cc/ZRV7-27B6>.

484. Michael B. Field & Elizabeth Davis, *Victim, Perpetrator, and Incident Characteristics of Sexual Victimization of Youth in Juvenile Facilities, 2018 – Statistical Tables*, U.S. DEP’T OF JUST., BUREAU OF JUST. STAT. (2020), <https://perma.cc/MY97-V4BS>.

485. *R.G. v. Koller*, 415 F.Supp.2d 1129, 1133–34 (D. Haw. 2006).

plaintiffs' actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>486</sup> The court also found that other detainees physically assaulted the plaintiffs because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>487</sup>

The attempted solution to prevent harassment and abuse in the juvenile justice system is often isolation.<sup>488</sup> The juvenile is separated from the rest of the population.<sup>489</sup> Though this is done with the safety of the juvenile in mind, this measure has negative consequences.<sup>490</sup> For example, the juvenile may negatively internalize their isolation as punishment for being LGBTQIA+.<sup>491</sup> The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry's Juvenile Justice Reform Committee found that solitary confinement and isolation can lead to depression, anxiety, and psychosis.<sup>492</sup> The Committee also found that juveniles, in particular, are at a higher risk of suffering these negative consequences, and that "the majority of suicides in juvenile correctional facilities occur when the individual is isolated."<sup>493</sup> The district court in *R.G.* found that the plaintiffs had a valid claim of abuse when the staff isolated them because the punitive effects of the confinement outweighed the safety benefits.<sup>494</sup>

### C. PROBLEMS SPECIFIC TO TRANSGENDER YOUTH

In addition to harassment and abuse, transgender individuals face additional obstacles in the juvenile justice system. This section discusses (1) how correctional institutions encounter difficulty in determining whether they should place transgender youth with male or female populations and (2) the lack of proper medical care transgender youth receive in correctional facilities.

#### 1. Placement

Correctional facilities encounter difficulty when trying to determine where to place transgender juveniles.<sup>495</sup> Prior to the PREA, these facilities would systematically place juveniles into male or female populations based on their birth sex.<sup>496</sup> Now, the PREA requires correctional institutions to make housing and program placement decisions relating to transgender and intersex people on an

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486. *Id.* at 1144. Because the transgender female aged out of the juvenile justice system at the time of the case, the court found she did not have standing. *Id.* at 1139. However, the court still found evidence of abuse against the transgender female relevant to the claims of the other two plaintiffs in subsequent analysis. *Id.*

487. *Id.* at 1147–48.

488. See *LGBTQ Youths in the Juvenile Justice System*, OFF. JUV. JUST. AND DELINQ. PREVENTION 6 (Aug. 2014), <https://perma.cc/WHT7-JSZS>.

489. *Id.*

490. *Id.*

491. *Id.*

492. *Solitary Confinement of Juvenile Offenders*, AM. ACAD. OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY (Apr. 2012), <https://perma.cc/AC5V-JVKP>.

493. *Id.*

494. *R.G. v. Koller*, 415 F.Supp.2d 1129, 1155–56 (D. Haw. 2006).

495. *LGBTQ Youths in the Juvenile Justice System*, *supra* note 488, at 6.

496. *Id.* at 6.

individualized basis.<sup>497</sup> For example, Dr. Bob Bidwell, member of the Equity Project Advisory Committee and pediatrician at the Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility, has argued that, "if a transgender boy cannot be safe with the boys, he can be placed with the girls, but only if his male identity is acknowledged and respected by the staff and other youth."<sup>498</sup> However, the gender identity of transgender individuals is often not respected by staff members.<sup>499</sup>

Placing the transgender individual into the wrong sex-based population can have detrimental effects on the individual.<sup>500</sup> The transgender youth can face "significant stress from being forced to conform to societal gender roles, as well as physical and sexual abuse perpetrated by residents and facility staff."<sup>501</sup> This was the case in *R.G.*, where the correctional facility residents and staff verbally assaulted the transgender plaintiff.<sup>502</sup> The staff threatened to and did transfer the plaintiff to the male population where she was sexually assaulted.<sup>503</sup>

## 2. Access to Medical Care

In addition to other challenges faced by transgender youth in the justice system, transgender youth also confront a lack of access to proper medical care while in juvenile detention.<sup>504</sup> When transgender youth enter a correctional facility, they may be denied access to hormone therapy despite having a previous prescription.<sup>505</sup> This can result in detrimental health consequences.<sup>506</sup> In *Rodriguez v. Johnson*,<sup>507</sup> the New York Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) denied a transgender woman access to hormone therapy even though she had received this treatment for several years prior to her detention; as a result, she suffered from "severe health consequences and emotional distress due to withdrawal symptoms after being forced to go without treatment."<sup>508</sup> Lambda Legal argued that the state had "a legal obligation to provide medical care and protection from harm to all young people in custody, including the provision of medically necessary care to transgender young people under 18."<sup>509</sup> The case was settled out of court.<sup>510</sup> As part of the settlement, the plaintiff received monetary damages and the state agreed to

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497. *Id.*

498. Katayoon Majd, Jody Marksamer, & Carolyn Reyes, *Hidden Injustice: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth in Juvenile Courts*, LEGAL SERV. FOR CHILD., NAT'L JUV. DEF. CTR., & NAT'L CTR. FOR LESBIAN RTS. 108 (2009), <https://perma.cc/CKV4-LVQA>.

499. *Id.* at 108–09.

500. *Id.* at 109.

501. *Id.*

502. *R.G. v. Koller*, 415 F.Supp.2d 1129, 1143 (D. Haw. 2006).

503. *Id.* at 1144–45.

504. Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, *supra* note 498, at 111–12.

505. Jaclyn Diaz, *Trans inmates need access to gender-affirming care. Often they have to sue to get it*, NPR (Oct. 25, 2022), <https://perma.cc/BK8M-WSW2>.

506. *Id.*

507. *Rodriguez v. Johnson, et al.*, LAMBDA LEGAL, <https://perma.cc/S4U2-3XRK>.

508. *Id.*

509. *Id.*

510. *Id.*

implement policies to ensure that transgender youth receive proper medical care.<sup>511</sup> Over the next five years, OCFS collaborated with Lambda Legal and other leading advocates to develop a toolkit with educational materials on ensuring the safety of LGBTQIA+ youth in juvenile justice and delinquency placements.<sup>512</sup> These materials assert that ignoring the medical care of an LGBTQIA+ young person in a New York state facility violates the right to safety, including the denial of transition-related health care to transgendered youth.<sup>513</sup>

#### D. HOW COURTS RESOLVE ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

Courts may evaluate abuse of LGBTQIA+ individuals in detention as cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment or, alternatively, as a violation of substantive due process guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>514</sup> The Supreme Court held that to find an Eighth Amendment violation, the deprivation must be “objectively, ‘sufficiently serious’” and the prison officials must have “acted with ‘deliberate indifference’” to the inmate’s health and safety.<sup>515</sup> In *Farmer v. Brennan*,<sup>516</sup> the Supreme Court found a violation of the Eighth Amendment when a transgender woman in an adult prison was raped after being placed with the male prison population, and remanded the case for further discovery.<sup>517</sup> In contrast, in *Bell v. Wolfish*,<sup>518</sup> the Supreme Court declined to apply the Eighth Amendment to adult pre-trial detainees who were not convicted of a crime and instead applied Fourteenth Amendment substantive due process.<sup>519</sup> The Court held that a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment occurs if the detainee is subject “to unsafe conditions or isolation . . . when done either with the express intent to punish or without a legitimate purpose.”<sup>520</sup> The Court further found that, even when the defendant states a legitimate interest, there can still be a due process violation if the unsafe conditions are so excessive as to outweigh the legitimate interest.<sup>521</sup>

The district court in *R.G.* held that the Fourteenth Amendment “amounts to punishment” standard, and not the Eighth Amendment “cruel and unusual punishment” standard, applies to juveniles.<sup>522</sup> However, while the Court applied the

511. *Settlement reached in case of Trans Youth against Juvenile Services*, SYLVIA RIVERA L. PROJECT (Dec. 22, 2006), <https://perma.cc/89EB-HUQA>.

512. *See id.*; *see also Informational Letter 20-OCFS-INF-10*, N.Y. OFF. OF CHILD. & FAM. SERVS. (July 14, 2020), <https://perma.cc/5W8T-ZL8V>; *Getting Down to Basics: Tools to Support LGBTQ Youth in Care*, LAMBDA LEGAL (July 31, 2014), <https://perma.cc/L88U-UVKC>.

513. *Keeping LGBTQ Youth Safe in Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Placements*, LAMBDA LEGAL (2015), <https://perma.cc/LE82-S3WV>.

514. *Compare Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825 (1994), with *R.G. v. Koller*, 415 F.Supp.2d 1129 (D. Haw. 2006).

515. *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 825–26.

516. *Id.*

517. *Id.* at 825–27.

518. *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520 (1979).

519. *Id.* at 520–21.

520. *R.G. v. Koller*, 415 F.Supp.2d 1129, 1152 (D. Haw. 2006) (citing *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520 (1979)).

521. *Id.*

522. *Id.*

“amounts to punishment” due process standard to the prison staff’s decision to place the three plaintiffs in protective custody, the Court also applied the Eighth Amendment “deliberate indifference” standard to the staff’s reaction to the abuse and harassment suffered by the plaintiff at the hands of the other delinquents.<sup>523</sup> The Court then found that the correctional facility staff’s decision to place the plaintiffs in isolation amounted to punishment and that the staff was deliberately indifferent to the other delinquents harming the three plaintiffs.<sup>524</sup> The Supreme Court has yet to clarify whether or not the Eighth Amendment standard is appropriate when evaluating abuse in juvenile detention centers.

## V. CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS PERTAINING TO LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

### A. THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT AND THE STUDENT NON-DISCRIMINATION ACT

In 2015, the House of Representatives<sup>525</sup> and the Senate<sup>526</sup> both passed bills to update the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA) was first introduced in 2011 and would prohibit elementary and secondary schools from discriminating against students based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity or their association with someone who is LGBT (*i.e.*, a parent or friend).<sup>527</sup> It received fifty-two votes as an amendment to the Senate ESEA bill, but, because it was subject to a sixty-vote threshold, the amendment failed.<sup>528</sup> Advocates were unsuccessful in pushing for the amendment’s addition in conference, and thus the ESEA reauthorization that became law did not include this provision.<sup>529</sup> In the past, SNDA has been introduced as a standalone bill.<sup>530</sup> The bill was reintroduced into Congress in March of 2018.<sup>531</sup> However, as of January 2025, there has been no further action taken on the bill.<sup>532</sup>

### B. THE EQUALITY ACT

In 2015, Senators Merkley, Baldwin, and Booker and Representatives Cicilline and Lewis introduced the Equality Act, which would extend a slew of civil rights protections to LGBTQIA+ persons.<sup>533</sup> Most notably for LGBTQIA+ youth, the bill would update Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include sexual

523. *Id.* at 1150–54.

524. *Id.* at 1154–59.

525. Student Success Act, H.R. 5, 114th Cong. (2015).

526. Every Student Succeeds Act, S. 1177, 114th Cong. (2015) (enacted).

527. *On the Amendment (Franken Amend. No. 2093)*, U.S. SENATE (July 14, 2015), <https://perma.cc/5CW9-FJLP>.

528. *Id.*

529. *See* Every Student Succeeds Act, Pub. L. No. 114-95, 129 Stat. 1802 (2015).

530. Student Non-Discrimination Act of 2015, S. 439, H.R. 846, 114th Cong. (2015).

531. Jennifer Pike Bailey, *Student Non-Discrimination Act Reintroduced in Congress*, HUM. RTS. CAMPAIGN (Mar. 21, 2018), <https://perma.cc/SC3W-Y7F8>.

532. *H.R.5374 - Student Non-Discrimination Act of 2018*, CONGRESS.GOV, (Mar. 21, 2018), <https://perma.cc/3Q2P-NR5K>.

533. Equality Act, S. 1858, H.R. 3185, 114th Cong. (2015).

orientation, gender identity, and sex.<sup>534</sup> Title VI prohibits any entity that receives government funds from discriminating based on the statute's enumerated protected classes.<sup>535</sup> In its current form, Title VI can be used to stop schools from discriminating against minority students and English Language Learners.<sup>536</sup> Should the Equality Act pass, it could be used to help prevent schools from discriminating against LGBTQIA+ students.

The Equality Act would also update Title II of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to provide protections based on sexual orientation, sex, and gender identity in public accommodations.<sup>537</sup> The bill would expand the categories of public places that fall under Title II.<sup>538</sup> While schools would not be explicitly included, a court could find that schools fit into one of the new, broadly worded categories that the equality Act would add, which include establishments that provide goods, services, or programs, as well as places of business such as restaurants, pharmacies, and entertainment venues.<sup>539</sup>

The House bill was submitted to the Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice on September 8, 2015.<sup>540</sup> The bill was not passed during the 114th Congress and has not been introduced by the 115th Congress.<sup>541</sup> During the 116th Congress, the Act originally passed in the House of Representatives in 2019, but the Senate failed to act on it further.<sup>542</sup> The Act was reintroduced during the 117th Congress and passed by a vote of 224–206 in the House of Representatives but once again has yet to pass in the Senate.<sup>543</sup>

#### C. THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES REGULATIONS IMPLEMENTING SECTION 1557 OF THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Section 1557 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) prohibits health care programs from discriminating against individuals based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.<sup>544</sup> On September 8, 2015, HHS issued a proposed rule implementing Section 1557.<sup>545</sup> The final rule was issued

534. *Id.* § 3.

535. 42 U.S.C. § 2000a (1964) (West, Westlaw through Pub. L. No. 117-262).

536. *See id.* (noting that Title VI already includes protections for classes such as race and nationality).

537. Equality Act S. 1858, H.R. 3185, 114th Cong. (2015).

538. *Id.*

539. *Id.* (noting that the Equality Act would apply to places that provide “exercise”—like a school P. E. class—“gathering,” or “program[s]”).

540. *Id.*

541. *See* H.R. Con. Res. 104, 114th Cong. (2015) (enacted).

542. Equality Act, H.R. 5, 116th Cong. (2019).

543. Equality Act, H.R. 5, 117th Cong. (2021).

544. 42 U.S.C.A. § 18116 (2010) (West, Westlaw through Pub. L. No. 119-1).

545. 45 C.F.R. § 92.1 (2016) (West, Westlaw through Mar. 14, 2025, 90 FR 12114); *see also* HHS takes next step in advancing health equity through the Affordable Care Act, WDAM (Sept. 5, 2015), <https://perma.cc/DBK3-DNYK>.

and became effective in July of 2016.<sup>546</sup> The rule prohibits discrimination based on both sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>547</sup> Among many other things, the rule prohibits blanket exclusions against services related to gender transition.<sup>548</sup>

#### D. TRANSGENDER ACCESS TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND RESTROOMS

The most publicized aspect of the struggle for rights for transgender persons in 2016 was the debate surrounding so-called “bathroom bills” in state legislatures.<sup>549</sup> The crux of these bills is that, in non-gender-neutral public facilities, transgender citizens will be required to use the facility that corresponds to the gender they were assigned at birth instead of the facility that corresponds to their gender identity.<sup>550</sup> Proponents of bathroom bills argue that these bills will increase public safety by stopping sexual predators from being able to enter the bathroom of the opposite sex and thus allowing them to get closer to their victims.<sup>551</sup> However, in the 18 states and over 200 municipalities that have enacted nondiscrimination laws allowing citizens to use the facility that corresponds with their gender identity, there has not been an increase in public safety incidents.<sup>552</sup> The opponents of bathroom bills argue that the bills actually create a safety hazard for transgender citizens due to the heightened risk of assault or harassment if they use the opposite facility of their gender identity.<sup>553</sup> Additionally, they could face criminal prosecution if they do choose to use the facility that corresponds to their gender identity.<sup>554</sup>

The primary bill being challenged was the Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act, otherwise known as House Bill 2, that was passed by the North Carolina legislature in March of 2016.<sup>555</sup> The DOJ filed suit against North Carolina in the Middle District of North Carolina on May 9, 2016, arguing that the law was in violation of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.<sup>556</sup> A preliminary injunction was issued, halting the U.S. from cutting off federal funding to North Carolina pending the outcome of the case.<sup>557</sup> Initially, North Carolina filed a countersuit seeking a declaratory judgment that the bill did not violate Title VII,

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546. 45 C.F.R. § 92.1 (2016); Nondiscrimination in Health Programs and Activities, 81 Fed. Reg. 31376 (May 18, 2016).

547. See *HHS takes next step in advancing health equity through the Affordable Care Act*, *supra* note 545.

548. See *id.*

549. See *New HRC Report Reveals Unprecedented Onslaught of State Legislation Targeting Transgender Americans*, HUM. RTS. CAMPAIGN (Feb. 22, 2016), <https://perma.cc/N6YX-9JY2>.

550. See, e.g., N.C. GEN. STAT. §§ 115C-521.2, 143-760 (2016).

551. See *The Facts: Bathroom Safety, Nondiscrimination Laws, and Bathroom Ban Laws*, EQUAL. FED’N INST., FREEDOM FOR ALL AMERICANS, NAT’L CTR. FOR TRANSGENDER EQUAL., MOVEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT (July 2016), <https://perma.cc/59L7-R4KR>.

552. *Id.*

553. *Id.*

554. *Id.*

555. *United States v. North Carolina*, 192 F.Supp.3d 620, 622 (M.D.N.C. 2016).

556. *Id.*

557. *Id.* at 628–30.

VAWA, or Title IX.<sup>558</sup> However, on September 16, 2016, Governor McCrory dropped the lawsuit because “it did not serve the ‘interests of judicial economy and efficiency.’”<sup>559</sup> A three year legal battle ensued,<sup>560</sup> and a settlement was finally reached in July of 2019.<sup>561</sup> The settlement prohibited the state government from banning citizens from using the bathroom facility that corresponds with their gender identity in state government buildings.<sup>562</sup> On December 1, 2020, House Bill 2 was officially repealed after it sunset and was automatically terminated.<sup>563</sup>

In 2017, a transgender student in Florida sued his school board after being told he would not be able to use the boys restroom at the school going forward.<sup>564</sup> In 2018, a Florida federal court held that it was unconstitutional for a school to prohibit its students from using the bathroom facility that corresponds with their gender identity.<sup>565</sup> In 2020, the Eleventh Circuit affirmed the lower court’s decision, holding that the schools may not punish students for gender nonconformity or treat trans students differently.<sup>566</sup> However, since 2021, laws requiring individuals to use the bathroom that corresponds to their sex assigned at birth in K-12 and colleges have continued to pass in many states.<sup>567</sup> In 2025, Ohio became the fourteenth state to enact a bathroom ban for K-12 transgender students with the “Protect All Students” Act.<sup>568</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSION

Although almost all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and questioning people have long faced difficulties finding inclusive public education, supportive environments at home, safe environments, and accessible health care, LGBTQIA+ youth are particularly vulnerable to the harms of discrimination and are barred from various legal benefits. The battle for the protection of LGBTQIA+ youth “is uphill because children are children, voteless and largely voiceless, and consequently relatively powerless. It is particularly uphill in the U. S., with our tradition of individual autonomy which keeps the government largely out of the family, limiting its role in protecting children.”<sup>569</sup>

558. *Id.* at 622.

559. Rebecca Hersher, *North Carolina Governor Drops ‘Bathroom Bill’ Lawsuit Against U.S.*, NPR (Sept. 19, 2016), <https://perma.cc/X5BA-2BGP>.

560. Dan Levin, *North Carolina Reaches Settlement on ‘Bathroom Bill’*, N.Y. TIMES (July 23, 2019), <https://perma.cc/F5K7-B4VB>.

561. *Id.*

562. *Id.*

563. Max Millington, *HB2 Is Officially Dead and Gone in NC. Here’s Why That Matters.*, CARDINAL & PINE (Dec. 3, 2020), <https://perma.cc/63QD-3AJY>.

564. Li Cohen, *Federal court rules that transgender students must be allowed to use bathrooms that match their gender*, CBS NEWS (Aug. 9, 2020), <https://perma.cc/VD2F-5CZA>.

565. *Id.*

566. *Id.*

567. Madison Czopek, *Which states have laws about transgender people’s bathroom use, and how are they enforced?* AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN (Dec. 6, 2024), <https://perma.cc/DY39-LLLN>.

568. Anna Merod & Kara Arundel, *Ohio becomes latest state to restrict transgender students’ bathroom access*, K-12 DIVE (Dec. 2, 2024), <https://perma.cc/K7HZ-534Z>.

569. Elizabeth Bartholet, *The Challenge of Children’s Rights Advocacy: Problems and Progress in the Area of Child Abuse and Neglect*, 3 WHITTIER J. CHILD & FAM. ADVOC. 215, 216 (2004).