

## Journalist Resource Series

# Guide for Reporting on Trans Youth and Sports



Illustration created by Zar Sikora

Nearly all young people can benefit socially and emotionally from participating in team sports.<sup>[1]</sup> Youth sports<sup>[2]</sup> instill critical lessons about leadership, teamwork, discipline, and community and contribute to a marked increase in self-esteem, especially among girls. However, right-wing politicians have engineered an onslaught of discriminatory legislation aimed at excluding transgender youth from receiving these benefits, their arguments bolstered only by transphobic mis- and disinformation. By amplifying fact-based narratives, along with uplifting stories of trans athletes, journalists and communities can help create a future where all young people can participate in the activities they love as their full and authentic selves, no matter their genders.

To connect with a spokesperson while covering trans youth athletes and anti-trans athletics bans please contact [press@athleteally.com](mailto:press@athleteally.com).

For general inquiries, or questions about this resource and other TLC media guides, please contact Sue Yacka-Bible at [sue@transgenderlawcenter.org](mailto:sue@transgenderlawcenter.org).



This guide is intended to be a tool for journalists reporting on transgender and nonbinary athletes, anti-trans athletics bans, and the harm these pieces of legislation can, have, and will cause to transgender youth across the country. While we use the phrase "anti-trans athletics bans" to indicate their outsized impact on transgender people, these bills also have a negative impact on nonbinary and intersex<sup>[3]</sup> people, along with all women and girls. Please be encouraged to research beyond this guide as you're working to report accurately and sensitively on these topics.

# 01 Talk to the Most Impacted

## Talk to trans youth themselves

We all deserve to be seen and respected for who we are. However, anti-trans politicians and media personalities continue to peddle mis- and disinformation intended to reinforce harmful narratives about transgender people, particularly Black trans women and femmes.<sup>[4]</sup> Research has found that the most effective inoculation to anti-trans rhetoric is getting to know a transgender person personally.<sup>[5]</sup> While not everyone will have the opportunity to make such meaningful connections, including trans youth of various backgrounds in media provides a clear entrypoint for compassion and understanding between readers and transgender young people.

The primary intention of anti-trans athletics bans is excluding trans students from participating in school athletics. Therefore, the voices of trans youth need to be front and center in any media coverage. Trans youth are experts in their own lives and experiences and can most directly speak to the impact of both this legislation and discriminatory rhetoric against trans athletes more broadly. When interviewing transgender young people, it's critical to uphold not only the highest standards of journalistic ethics,<sup>[6]</sup> but also trauma-informed interview practices.<sup>[7]</sup> This might include obscuring information that could endanger them, respecting the right of trans young people to opt out of specific questions or participating entirely, and avoiding irrelevant or invasive questions.



Bills that try to ban trans youth from playing sports continue harmful practices of using legislation to target vulnerable communities and to use policy in order to police the bodies of athletes from marginalized communities; trans youth exist at the intersection of these realities. All students have the right to bring their full selves to school and the right to have their most authentic selves respected.

— GIA CORDOVA (SHE/HER), Co-Executive Director, GSA Network



## Talk to BIPOC and disabled trans youth

Sports have a lengthy and enduring history of racist and ableist discrimination, and youth sports are no exception. This discrimination is woven into the very policies and rulebooks that govern youth sports and compounds the impact of anti-trans athletics bans on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and disabled<sup>[9]</sup> trans youth. It is crucial that any coverage on youth sports focuses on intersectional analyses of the subject, including:

- ☀ Economic disparities between BIPOC families and white families<sup>[9]</sup> as a key driving factor of racial disparities in accessing youth sports.
- ☀ Access barriers to disabled youth participating in sports,<sup>[10]</sup> how the COVID-19 pandemic has widened this access gap, and how medical ableism intersects with conservatives' ongoing crusade against trans girl athletes.
- ☀ BIPOC and disabled athletes often lacking representation in professional sports, in addition to being actively excluded from participation. Even when encouraged to play, this lack of representation can cause these athletes to feel excluded, unwelcome, or unable to participate.
- ☀ Notable, harmful differences in the ways the media discusses Black and brown athletes, particularly Black and brown women, when compared to other athletes. For example:
  - Black women<sup>[11]</sup> and girls are more likely to be subjected to "sex verification" testing in order to compete, which in addition to being demoralizing has historically excluded Black women through invasive testing (such as genital inspections), strict rule changes, and unnecessary drug tests.
  - Black and brown trans students have historically been disproportionately targeted by discriminatory legal battles.
  - Anti-Black racism, misogynoir<sup>[12]</sup>, and transmisogynoir<sup>[13]</sup> more specifically are often the catalysts for hateful legislation.

## On the subject of bodies, all questions are off-limits

Arguments against trans student athlete participation are rife with graphic and erroneous medical information. Anti-trans athletics bans are an attempt to not only legitimize but operationalize this disinformation. It is never appropriate to ask trans youth about their bodies, hormones, or medical care. Instead, you can:

- ✓ Maintain clear boundaries around what is or isn't relevant to the story.
- ✓ Create space and time for trans youth to set their own boundaries and proceed to honor these.
- ✓ Ask youth about their experiences participating in sports and on teams and the value it adds to their lives.
- ✓ Ask about the social and emotional impacts of anti-trans athletics bans.

## Talk to supportive adults who are showing up for trans youth

Many trans youth athletes are supported by their parents, caregivers, coaches, and peers in participating in sports. To dispel the perception that the opposite is true, reporting on trans youth should include the voices of supportive adults. Trans youth athletes deserve to know they have adults in their corner, particularly those who are most directly impacted by anti-trans athletics bans.

### This can include:

**Parents and guardians of trans youth**



**Teachers and school administrators**



**Coaches and State Athletics Association representatives**



In stark contrast to anti-trans athletics bans, a growing number of states have passed pro-trans legislation aiming to increase the inclusion and safety of trans athletes, without restriction. These policies have remained in place for years without issue or incident. In fact, research from the Center for American Progress shows that states with trans-inclusive policies have higher athletic participation rates for all girls<sup>[14]</sup>, even in states where the number of athletes has decreased<sup>[15]</sup> overall.

Check out [TransAthlete's K-12 map](#)<sup>[16]</sup> for up-to-date information on policies by state.

# 02 Share About Why Anti-Trans Athletics Bans are Harmful

Have a negative social and emotional impact on trans and nonbinary youth by:

## Reducing their access to activities that benefit their health

Banning trans athletes from sports participation places them at greater risk for poor cardiovascular health<sup>[17]</sup> and decreased bone density, and precludes them from the benefits to neurocognitive development that sports participation yields.

## Forcing them to choose between invalidation or exclusion

Anti-trans athletics bans put transgender youth in an impossible position: having to choose between participating on a team that does not align with their gender, or forgoing the joy of being a part of a team altogether.

## Ostracizing trans youth from their peers

Sports give young people the opportunity to spend time with one another while engaged in a fun activity, thus facilitating connection, critical social opportunities, and often meaningful relationships. When asked, the vast majority of youth—regardless of their genders—report that having fun and making friends are their primary reasons for participating.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Making them the subject of public scrutiny

Along with debating their right to play sports, anti-trans narratives repeatedly call into question the validity of trans people's identities, motivations, and athletic achievements, with Black trans girls facing the brunt of this scrutiny. The mass proliferation of anti-trans rhetoric across media, communities, and statehouses has had a profoundly negative impact on trans young peoples' mental health.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Forcing them to defend their rights

Young people should be able to focus on school, time with friends, and enjoying their lives. As anti-trans politicians continue pushing discriminatory legislation, transgender young people are being forced into the role of advocate, being called before congress and communities in an attempt to convince lawmakers not to take away their rights. This is discriminatory, damaging, and places an undue burden on young people and their families when compared to their cisgender peers.



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# 03 Reframe the Conversation on Trans Athletes

Research shows that repeating right-wing talking points, even for the purpose of disproving them, often has the unintended impact of reinforcing their beliefs and advancing their agenda in your readers' minds.



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## Instead of reiterating falsehoods, reframe the conversation by:

- ★ Leading with fact-based, affirming narratives about transgender athletes, including external references that bolster your arguments.
- ★ When possible, shifting away from a competitive, individualistic lens about sports.<sup>[5]</sup> Instead, emphasize the far-reaching benefits of sports participation on youth—such as the opportunity to increase leadership skills, teamwork, self-esteem, discipline, and community bonds.<sup>[20]</sup>
- ★ Emphasizing the ways in which discrimination against transgender athletes resembles discrimination against women, BIPOC, and disabled athletes, including blatant misogyny, eligibility for fewer scholarships, less support and funding for programs that include them, and being taken less seriously than their cis man counterparts.

# 04 Draw Attention to Anti-LGBTQ Bad Actors Behind the Scenes & Follow the Money

The proliferation of anti-trans student athlete bans reflects the meticulously and intentionally orchestrated, long-standing anti-trans campaigns<sup>[21]</sup> of powerful far-right anti-LGBTQ legal organizations and coalitions. Historically, groups like Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), Family Research Council (FRC), Liberty Council, and Heritage Foundation have directly or indirectly fueled the introduction of many of these bans.

Parallel to these efforts, an increasing number of local and statewide groups are organizing for the purpose of pushing a transphobic agenda. Various state legislatures contain subgroups or caucuses who are primarily responsible for the creation and proposal of anti-trans legislation. South Dakota State Rep. Fred Deutsch organized by email<sup>[22]</sup> for years with notable anti-trans voices to craft messaging and orchestrate a national assault on trans rights.<sup>[23]</sup> ADF played a key role in drafting the language for ID HB 500,<sup>[24]</sup> which has become a template for anti-trans athletics bans nationwide.

## Investigate and share about:

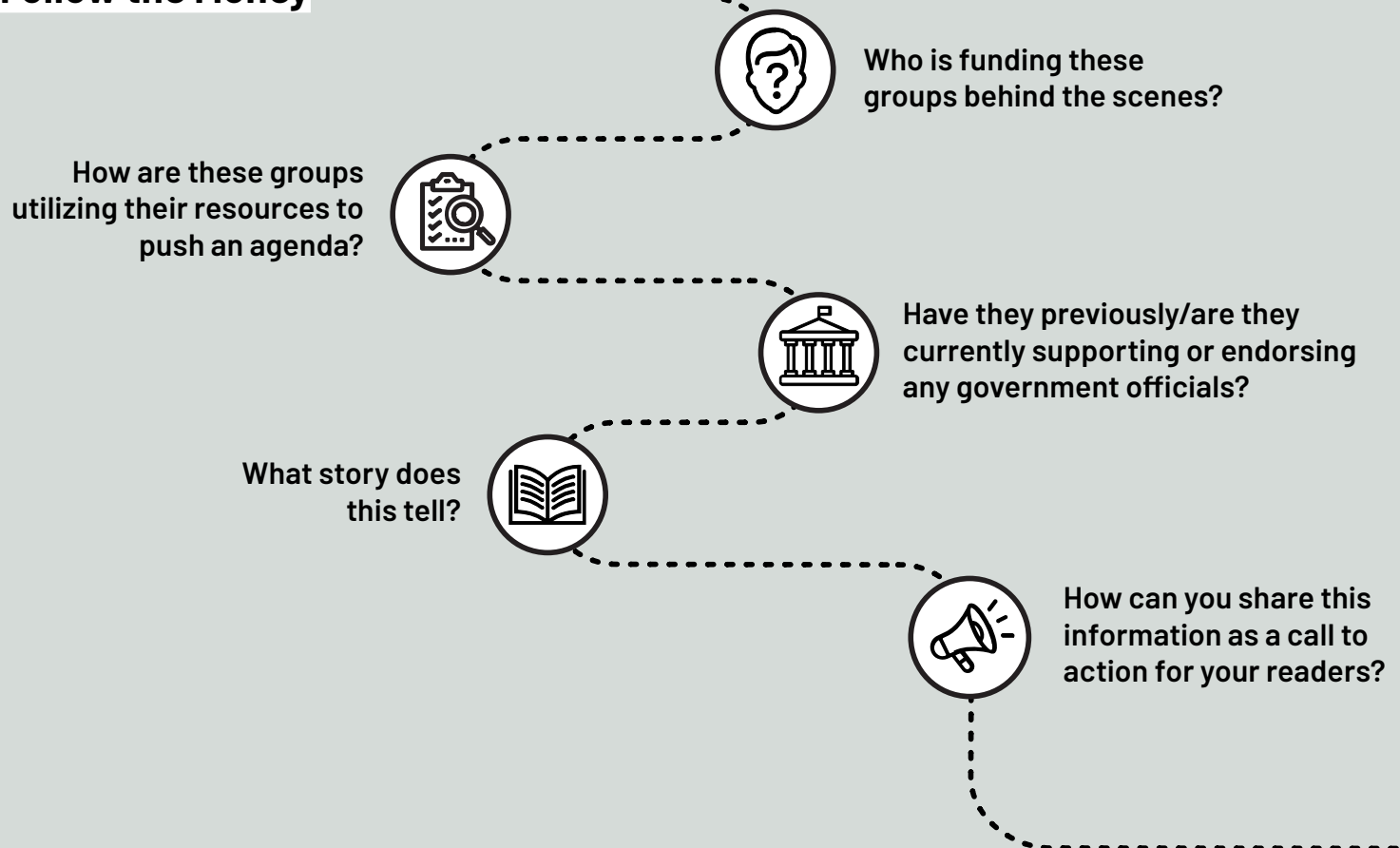
- ☀ The anti-trans histories and agendas of far-right anti-LGBTQ organizations and coalitions. Check out Southern Poverty Law Center's Anti-LGBTQ Hate Map<sup>[25]</sup> for information on active hate groups in your state. Avoid linking to these groups' websites in your reporting so as not to increase their reach or ad revenue.
- ☀ The depth of far-right religious organizational involvement in the issue of trans athletics, for example, ADF's "Fair Fight" focus and recent lawsuits, including *Soule v. Connecticut*<sup>[26]</sup> and *Hecox v. Little*.<sup>[27]</sup>
- ☀ The long-standing campaign of far-right legal attacks<sup>[28]</sup> on LGBTQ people in the U.S., as recently evidenced by ADF's suit in *Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* and *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*,<sup>[29]</sup> but going back nearly 20 years.
- ☀ Local and state groups pushing a hateful, anti-trans agenda, including anti-LGBTQ churches, legislative caucuses, committees, and subgroups, and "concerned" parents groups.

## A Wealthy Few Are Controlling Our Democracy

We know that in politics, money is power. By injecting cash into targeted elections<sup>[30]</sup> and funding issue- and candidate-specific lobbying groups,<sup>[31]</sup> a small group of wealthy individuals<sup>[32]</sup> and organizations<sup>[33]</sup> has taken control over our democracy. Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of these donors are aligned with a far-right ideology.

When writing about attacks on trans athletes, research and report on the key players in your area funding far-right anti-trans extremists and policies. Emphasize the need for common sense campaign finance laws<sup>[34]</sup> to ensure all people are given a voice in our democracy, no matter their income level, race, or genders.

### Follow the Money<sup>[35]</sup>



## 05

# Stay Up To Date on Anti-Trans Legislation

Stay up to date on this year's anti-transgender legislation using Equality Federation's Anti-Transgender Legislative Tracker.<sup>[36]</sup> This tracker focuses on data from the current legislative session and therefore does not contain historical data about anti-trans legislation.

For information about current state policies affecting trans youth, check out Movement Advancement Project's Equality Maps<sup>[37]</sup> and TransAthlete's policy tracker.<sup>[16]</sup>

Include information about how your readers can obtain legal assistance and/or take action against anti-trans legislation in their state, including but not limited to contacting their local ACLU affiliate<sup>[38]</sup> or Equality Federation member organization(s).<sup>[39]</sup>

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Include state and local trans leadership in your reporting. Your local ACLU affiliate, Equality Federation member organizations(s), and Transgender Law Center may be helpful in connecting you with trans-led organizations. Additionally, Athlete Ally<sup>[40]</sup> can connect you with trans athletes.

# Resources

- 1 [Fact Sheet: The Importance of Sports Participation for Transgender Youth - Center for American Progress](#)
- 2 [Watch Changing the Game Streaming Online | Hulu \(Free Trial\)](#)
- 3 [interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth](#)
- 4 [Trans Agenda for Liberation - Black Trans Women and Black Trans Femmes: Leading & Living Fiercely - Transgender Law Center](#)
- 5 [Messaging Guide: Transgender Youth and the Freedom to Be Ourselves](#)
- 6 [Publishing identifying information about trans children - Trans Journalists Association](#)
- 7 [Toolkit: Trauma-Informed Journalism](#)
- 8 [Trans Agenda for Liberation - Defining Ourselves - Transgender Law Center](#)
- 9 [Racial inequality in youth sports: Understanding the barriers presented to Black athletes](#)
- 10 [Barriers to Participation of Children with Disabilities in Youth Sports](#)
- 11 [What to Know About Olympic Runner Caster Semenya, and Why Her Case Matters](#)
- 12 [Moya Bailey, "Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance" | Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America | Brown University](#)
- 13 [The Anatomy of Transmisogynoir - Ashlee Marie Preston](#)
- 14 [Fair Play - Center for American Progress](#)
- 15 [Connecticut high school sports participation drops for the first time in over a decade, mirroring national trend](#)
- 16 [TRANSATHLETE High school transgender athlete policies](#)
- 17 [The Medical Implications of Banning Transgender Youth From Sport Participation | Adolescent Medicine | JAMA Pediatrics](#)
- 18 [Participation Trends - Project Play](#)
- 19 [The Trevor Project: 2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People](#)
- 20 [Fact Sheet: The Importance of Sports Participation for Transgender Youth - Center for American Progress](#)

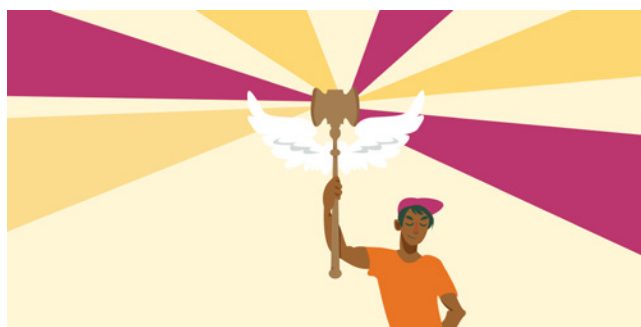
# Resources

- 21 [The Anti-Trans Hate Machine: A Plot Against Equality: It's Not Really About Sports on Apple Podcasts](#)
- 22 [Inside the Secret Working Group That Helped Push Anti-Trans Laws Across the Country – Mother Jones](#)
- 23 [The Anti-Trans Hate Machine: A Plot Against Equality on Apple Podcasts](#)
- 24 [A Hate Group Is Reportedly Behind 2021's Dangerous Wave of Anti-Trans Bills | Them](#)
- 25 [Hate Map | Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- 26 [Soule v. Connecticut | ACLU](#)
- 27 [Hecox v. Little - Idaho's Transgender Sports Ban Faces A Major Legal Hurdle: NPR](#)
- 28 [The Next Targets for the Group That Overturned Roe](#)
- 29 [Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization | American Civil Liberties Union](#)
- 30 [How the Koch brothers used their massive fortune to power a conservative crusade that reshaped American politics](#)
- 31 [Meet the 'Feminists' Doing the Koch Brothers' Dirty Work | The Nation](#)
- 32 [The Increasing Influence of Billionaires on US Politics: America's Hidden Oligarchy – MIR](#)
- 33 [Follow the Money Behind Anti-Abortion Laws | Brennan Center for Justice](#)
- 34 [Limits on the Influence of Money in Politics - Common Cause](#)
- 35 [Dark Money "Women's Groups" Are Using Anti-Trans Scaremongering to Oppose ERA | Truthout](#)
- 36 [Equality Federation's Anti-Transgender Legislative Tracker](#)
- 37 [Movement Advancement Project's Equality Maps](#)
- 38 [Affiliates | American Civil Liberties Union](#)
- 39 [Equality Federation member organization\(s\)](#)
- 40 [Contact - Athlete Ally](#)

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