

Texas' new attack on transgender care called 'political ploy'

by [Mark Wingfield](#) in the [March 23, 2022](#) issue



(Photo by Sharon McCutheon on Unsplash)

One week before statewide primary elections, Texas governor Greg Abbott and Texas attorney general Ken Paxton launched an attack on the state's transgender children and their families, threatening to charge parents, teachers, and medical professionals with child abuse if they help provide gender-affirming care to minors.

"It is clearly and explicitly a political ploy, and it's about power and retaining power," said Presbyterian minister and transgender advocate Remington Johnson. "And the people they are using to get their power from are children. They are hurting children to try to hold onto their power."

Statewide, parents of transgender children were sent into a panic by the governor's February 22 letter to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services about "conduct[ing] a prompt and thorough investigation of any reported instances" of children receiving "abusive gender-transitioning procedures."

The governor based his demand on a ruling the week before by the attorney general that "so-called 'sex change' procedures constitute child abuse under existing Texas law."

"It's really scary. They're now attacking anyone who supports trans kids," said Rachel Gonzales, a Dallas parent of a transgender child. "He's coming after everyone. It's a ridiculous, theatrical showdown."

The timing of Abbott and Paxton's coordinated announcement says everything about their motivation, Gonzales asserted. Both men faced primary challenges from the far right.

Johnson, who lives in Austin, is a frequent presence at the state capitol advocating for transgender rights.

Sadly, Johnson said, recent attempts to legislate against transgender people often have been couched in language of religious freedom, basically granting conservative Christians the right to refuse to do anything they oppose or deny the existence of people they don't want to see.

It's a deliberate change of course from the so-called bathroom bills that were popular two years ago. Johnson said Republicans are constantly looking for an issue that turns out Republican voters but doesn't turn out Democrats.

The answer, Johnson said, is “going after transgender children.” Such legislation fires up support from Republican voters but doesn’t turn out Democratic voters in protest.

The transgender population are easy-to-hide victims, she explained. “Most transgender children are completely invisible. The terrible cruelty of this is that for the parents and children who came out against these bills, they were putting their safety at risk. There were death threats against the parents, one of our trans teens was attacked, and what is harder now is that all these people’s faces are out there.”

After Paxton’s announcement, Gonzales put together an emergency Zoom call with worried parents of transgender children. With less than 24 hours’ notice, 447 people registered to participate. The main message she tried to convey is “don’t panic,” Gonzales said. While the threat from Abbott and Paxton is real, neither has the authority to alter existing state laws.

But while parents who live near support groups and medical care may get this message, parents and care providers in more remote parts of the state may not, she said. “The thing I’m personally concerned about is the schools in small-town Texas that are seeing this and thinking they have a responsibility to follow through, who don’t know there isn’t actually legal standing.”

All major civil rights groups have issued statements denouncing the Abbott and Paxton play. And five district attorneys have said they will not enforce or facilitate the governor’s demands.

Meanwhile, the White House issued a statement saying it is dangerous for elected officials to label gender-affirming medical care for transgender youth as “child abuse.”

“Conservative officials in Texas and other states across the country should stop inserting themselves into health care decisions” and should not “create needless tension between pediatricians and their patients,” White House principal deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. “No parent should face the agony of a politician standing in the way of accessing life-saving care for their child.” —Baptist News Global