

Resolution # 71-01

**The Graduate and Professional Student Association
(GPSA)
The Pennsylvania State University**



of the 71st Assembly
April 28, 2021

Addressing the safety of our trans community at Penn State

Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,

(Decided: [Y / N / A])

Nature of the Situation:

1 Throughout the nation, transgender and gender diverse individuals have been facing
2 increased stigma, rejection, and discrimination. In the first 3 months of 2021, 82 anti-
3 transgender bills have been introduced nationwide, which is greater than the 2020 total
4 of 79 anti-trans bills.¹ Three states have successfully passed legislation directed at trans
5 youth, while 28 states are considering over 60 additional anti-trans bills.² Mississippi
6 passed Senate Bill 2536 barring transgender women from competing in women's sports
7 in the state's schools or universities.³ Tennessee signed a similar law which requires
8 students above 4th grade to show legal documents demonstrating assigned birth.⁴ On
9 March 29, 2021, the Arkansas Senate passed the most anti-trans law to pass through
10 state legislature to date. This law will ban gender-affirming healthcare to transgender

¹ <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/breaking-2021-becomes-record-year-for-anti-transgender-legislation>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/28/us/transgender-rights-arkansas-tennessee-anti-trans-laws/index.html>

³ <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2021/html/SB/2500-2599/SB2536IN.htm>

⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/26/us/tennessee-transgender-sports-bill-law/index.html>

1 youth.⁵ This influx of anti-trans legislation is concerning and directly affects the health and
2 safety of students at Pennsylvania State University.

3
4 Of all the 50 states, Pennsylvania is ranked 26 in terms of transgender rights and
5 protections. At the state level, there are no explicit protections for transgender people
6 against harassment and discrimination.⁶ In Centre County, the Borough of State College
7 and Borough of Bellefonte are the only jurisdictions to ban conversion therapy. ⁷ ⁸ Rachel
8 Leland Levine was a professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at Penn State College of
9 Medicine from 1996-2015, when she left to assume a role as the Secretary of the
10 Pennsylvania Department of Health. In this role she has faced multiple instances of
11 transphobia. ⁹ She faced renewed attacks over the past few months as she was
12 confirmed by the US Senate as secretary for health under the Biden administration.¹⁰
13 Centre County Correctional Facility is currently facing a civil rights lawsuit after refusing
14 to correctly gender an inmate. ¹¹

15
16 By allowing transphobic events to occur in Pennsylvania without condemnation, we are
17 putting the health and safety of our trans community at risk. Trans individuals are one of
18 the most vulnerable groups on campus when it comes to mental health. In a 2015 survey
19 of more than 24,000 trans individuals conducted by the Center for Transgender Equality,
20 1 in 4 individuals who were openly or perceived to be trans were harassed on campus.
21 Of those, 16% dropped out because of the harassment and 244 were expelled or forced
22 to leave.¹² A 2016 study showed that trans students who do not have access to
23 bathrooms or gender appropriate accommodations are more likely to attempt suicide.¹³

24
25 At Penn State University, our trans community faces additional challenges on top of
26 navigating their work. When a student transitions and changes their name, they are faced
27 with multiple options. If they choose to change their name only at the University and not
28 legally, many departments are unable to acknowledge the new name. However, the cost
29 of a legal name change is a huge financial barrier for many students. Based on the
30 aforementioned 2015 survey, 35% of individuals were not able to pursue a legal name
31 change due to the cost associated with legal fees. On campus, the process of changing
32 a student's name is complicated. LionPATH, Canvas and student IDs use the same
33 system but changing a name in University Health Services is an entirely different process.

⁵ <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/arkansas-passes-bill-ban-gender-affirming-care-trans-youth-n1262412>

⁶ <https://www.aclupa.org/en/issues/lgbqt-equality>

⁷ <https://www.centredaily.com/news/local/community/state-college/article198573544.html>

⁸ <https://www.centredaily.com/article215011430.html>

⁹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/pennsylvania-fair-becomes-ensnared-online-transphobia-n1234648>

¹⁰ <https://www.ydr.com/story/news/politics/elections/2021/02/25/dr-rachel-levine-faces-transphobia-u-s-senate-confirmation-hearing/6816526002/>

¹¹ <https://www.centredaily.com/news/local/community/article248744560.html>

¹² <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-lgbt-education/barred-bullied-depressed-life-for-many-u-s-trans-students-idUSKCN1V609P>

¹³ https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/ssw_facpub/64/

1
2 Unfortunately, the name change is the easiest part of transitioning at Penn State. There
3 are many barriers in health care that our trans community needs to overcome both at
4 UHS and through United Healthcare. Many individuals have stated that at UHS they have
5 been deadnamed either during their appointment or in the waiting room. Using the wrong
6 name during appointments is a direct hazard to the mental and physical wellbeing of the
7 students who may face anti-trans harassment and discrimination later. Additionally,
8 students have reported many issues regarding United Healthcare's transgender related
9 policies. Some individuals have reported that when they attempted to schedule gender
10 affirming surgeries, they had to go through an intense process that required being
11 diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder. This diagnosis is considered very transphobic
12 as it suggests that gender identity is a mental health issue. Additionally, in some cases
13 UHC has told caseworkers that gender affirming surgeries may not be medically
14 necessary and might not be covered with less than 20 hours notice before the
15 appointment. UHC also has stated that if individuals pay out of pocket while waiting for a
16 decision, that is justification for UHC to justify the procedure as not being covered. This
17 policy is incredibly transphobic and puts the health, financial security, and mental
18 wellbeing of our students at risk.

19
20 Transgender students also face discrimination in their class and research spaces. The
21 University policy of nondiscrimination and the commitment to inclusion has led to the
22 Office of Physical Plant creating several standards for the design and construction of
23 single user toilet rooms. However, many of the existing buildings do not have gender
24 neutral or single use bathrooms, thus requiring students to continuously out themselves
25 in public. This puts them at direct risk of discrimination and harassment. Furthermore,
26 there have been instances where professors have deadnamed individuals and doubled
27 down when approached.¹⁴

30 **Recommended Course of Action:**

31 The Penn State Graduate and Professional Student Association formally recommends
32 the University take the following actions:

- 33 1. Install ADA accessible, single user, gender neutral restrooms in all buildings.
- 34 2. Improve trans affirming healthcare access through United HealthCare and reevaluate
35 the student insurance policy to ensure that UHC is the most trans affirming policy on
36 the market for students (as college is a time where many trans students have
37 insurance/insurance separate from their parents for the first time & seek trans health
38 care for the first time). Trans affirming health care that should be made available to
39 students includes, but is not limited to: hormone replacement therapy, gender
40 affirming surgeries, and access to professionals trained in transgender health care.
- 41 3. Hire additional patient advocates to assist transgender students who are having
42 issues with healthcare.

¹⁴ https://www.collegian.psu.edu/news/campus/article_736514ca-f8fb-11e8-9ae6-ef873708a2d0.html

- 1 4. Establish accountability and experience in UHS that is based on sexual and gender
2 equity. In the short term, hire at least two physicians who have training and experience
3 writing letters in support of gender affirming surgeries.
- 4 5. Hire additional CAPS staff who are trained and experienced in transgender supportive
5 care, including but not limited to sexual assault, racial inequity, past trauma, and family
6 trauma.
- 7 6. Every student has the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that match
8 their gender identity. Pronouns and renaming options on Zoom should be modified so
9 students are able to add/change their pronouns and chosen names to apply to all
10 future online platform meetings, including but not limited to Zoom, Skype, Teams,
11 Canvas, Google, etc.
- 12 7. Create options for adding pronouns and correct names on departmental websites that
13 list graduate and professional student names.
- 14 8. Update UHS forms to be gender neutral, including those dealing with reproductive
15 health.
- 16 9. Provide additional trans affirming training on the importance of using a trans persons
17 chosen name and pronouns for UHS nurses and staff. Additionally, the University
18 should require basic transgender sensitivity training to ensure all employees are
19 aware of what terms are considered slurs and the importance of using correct names
20 and correct pronouns for students.
- 21 10. Hire additional staff at the Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity to increase the
22 availability of the diversity and equity training for faculty, staff, administrators, and the
23 Board of Trustees related to affirming LGBTQA+ experiences in the classroom and
24 research spaces.
- 25 11. Adopt an equitable process for hiring, training, and maintaining trans-identified
26 knowledgeable staff members by departments and administrators.
- 27 12. Update the Graduate School application form to represent gender diversity.

Respectfully submitted,

Yashasvika Duggal

Delegate, Eberly College of Science

Eli Fields

Delegate, Penn State Law

President _____ Affirm Veto

The Graduate and Professional Student Association