Transgender Justice Is Key to Ending the HIV Epidemic

Here's why 2021 is "the worst year in recent history for LGBTQ state legislative attacks."

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The fight for transgender justice is an integral part of the path to ending the HIV epidemic in the United States. Amid a movement of state legislatures pushing horrific anti-transgender laws and a rise in fatal anti-transgender violence, it is more important than ever before for us to speak out.

Organizations across social justice movements have rightly called 2021 "the worst year in recent history for LGBTQ state legislative attacks." More than 250 anti-LGBTQ bills have been introduced this year in state legislatures around the country, including many that target trans young people's access to sports, bathrooms or even accessing affirming, necessary medical care. Some of these have already passed, such as Arkansas' bill banning transition care for trans youth.

But organizations like our partners at Black Trans Media, SNAP Co. and the Transgender Law Center are working day in and day out to raise up the stories of other transgender and gender-nonconforming folks and shine a light on their resiliency. Media outlets like Them provide much-needed coverage of stories that too often go untold.

"We have generations of ancestral rage," wrote the Transgender Law Center in a piece for Teen Vogue earlier this year. "We've inherited the trauma of the past gender-variant teachers, healers, and warriors who built the bridge we walk upon. But we also have centuries of sacred wisdom. Before the United States had its first president, there was trans wisdom. There was trans brilliance. We have the solution to a freer world for all people: The Trans Agenda for Liberation."

The Trans Agenda for Liberation is a powerful community-led resource to address the violence, inequities and discrimination that the transgender community faces every day. The agenda "channels trans imagination to bring our boldest visions to life."

Still, visibility alone is not enough. Visibility without protection and acceptance can create further vulnerabilities and danger. In 2021, at least 24 transgender or gender-nonconforming people have been killed, per reporting, marking a startling rise in anti-transgender violence compared to previous years. Transgender and gender-noncomforting people — particularly Black and brown trans women across the nation — continue to face violence and a high risk of receiving an HIV diagnosis.

We have to support transgender and gender-nonconforming folks in building a world where everyone has access to the resources they need to thrive. It starts with sharing stories and breaking down hatred and transphobia.

We have to ensure that health care providers are culturally humble and competent when it comes to providing transgender care and that all transgender and gender-nonconforming people feel safe to access the care they deserve.

Alongside our grantees and partners, we provide mentorship and training to transgender and gender-nonconforming people, support the provision of direct services to TGNC communities and push for policy that makes sure that folks have the resources, access and advocacy to knock down barriers to prevention and care.

We have to encourage our legislators at all levels of government to do more to stop harmful legislation in its tracks and enshrine protections into law. We need the Senate to pass the Equality Act.

We cannot end the HIV epidemic without actively working to solidify transgender power in our society, across all aspects of our lives. We have to meet trans and gender-nonconforming folks' resiliency with the same fire and support needed to create lasting change.

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