



Statement Opposing Actions in Texas to Characterize Gender-Affirming Care as Child Abuse
March 2022

The National Child Abuse Coalition, a coalition of twenty-six national organizations advocating for the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect, opposes the recent actions of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, Governor Greg Abbott, and the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Commissioner Jaime Masters to characterize gender-affirming care as child abuse. We further oppose actions requiring child protective services to investigate parents who provide gender-affirming healthcare to youth. Although they are not legally binding, these actions will have far-reaching and negative consequences for youth, families, and the entire child protective system.

Best practice in child welfare has long recognized that gender affirming health care, combined with high-quality mental health services, are critical for the well-being of transgender youth. It is the overwhelming consensus among major accredited medical associations and mental health professional associations that gender-affirming care is a lifesaving standard of care – endorsed by key medical groups such as the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in the child welfare system; for these young people, preventing child abuse and neglect involves child welfare professionals supporting families to understand their youth’s identity and connect them to identity-affirming care and mental health services. When such services are denied, transgender youth experience high rates of depression, substance use disorders, and suicide. The recent actions in Texas therefore stand in direct opposition to best practice and are in fact harmful to the well-being of young people. We strongly disagree with the characterization of gender-affirming care as child abuse.

The child welfare system is a legal system with extraordinary governmental authority to intrude in families’ lives when it is necessary to ensure the safety of a child. Issuing subjective determinations about what constitutes child abuse – particularly determinations that run counter to the wisdom of the medical community – undermines the important role of child protection professionals, including courts, to assess for and make careful decisions about risk and safety to the child and the protective capacity of parents.

The Texas actions will also divert scarce resources away from child protective services’ efforts to address the most egregious cases of child abuse and neglect that truly harm children. Child protection systems are already struggling to keep up with investigations given unprecedented vacancies in their workforce, and this will put further strain on the system to keep up. These actions have the added consequence of undermining the child welfare system’s credibility with families – which does particular damage to numerous efforts underway in the field to ensure children and families who touch the child welfare system are connected to supportive community-based services designed to strengthen, preserve, and promote the well-being of families.

The National Child Abuse Coalition has and will continue to advocate for comprehensive policy reforms to prevent and address child abuse and neglect among, and honor the dignity and inherent worth of, all children, youth and their families, including transgender people.