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CANADA reintroduces bill banning LGBT conversion therapy

By Mahad Arale

Reuters (01.10.2020) - <https://reut.rs/3d92G9L> - Canada has reintroduced a bill on Thursday that will criminalize LGBT conversion therapy, a federal minister said after an earlier effort to ban the practice failed as the parliament was discontinued due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Conversion therapy is any practice designed to change a person's sexual orientation, which especially harms and stigmatizes those belonging to the lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans community.

Federal Minister of Justice David Lametti said the new bill will include five amendments to Canada's Criminal Code to include offences such as causing a minor to undergo conversion therapy, causing any person to undergo the therapy against their will, and profiting off from the practice.

The bill was previously introduced in the House of Commons in March.

"Conversion therapy is harmful, degrading, and has no place in Canada ... I hope that all parties will do the right thing by supporting this bill," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters on Thursday.

Trudeau's Liberal Party promised to ban the practice during an unveiling of the party's election platform last year.

The bill was presented in the House of Commons on Thursday though no voting date has been set.

Some 20% of sexual minority men in Canada have undergone some form of conversion therapy, according government data. Lower income, indigenous and trans people are disproportionately exposed to the practice, the data shows.

The bill will not apply to those seeking guidance and support from counselors or faith leaders.

Canadian cities such as Vancouver in British Columbia and Calgary in Alberta are banning the practice within their borders, a government statement said.

CHILE: Petition to preserve religious liberty in Chile launched

Catholic News Agency (23.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3uCbPQG> - Alliance Defending Freedom International has launched a petition addressed to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to rule in favor of religious freedom in Chile.

The ruling will have ramifications for all member states of the Organization of American States.

The petition campaign addresses the case of Sandra Pavez, a lesbian and former nun. The Diocese of San Bernardo did not renew her certificate of suitability to continue teaching religion classes in 2007 because Pavez chose to cohabit with her female partner and go public with the relationship.

Bishop Juan Ignacio González Errazuriz of San Bernardo had informed Pavez that if she continued in that relationship "he would be obliged to revoke her certificate of suitability, for not giving 'the witness of a Christian life', which the Catholic Church expects from its teachers," the campaign explains.

Religion classes in Chile are governed by Decree 924 of 1983, issued by the country's Ministry of Education, which requires all schools to offer optional religion classes in accordance with the student's religion. The decree also states that the teacher must have a certificate of suitability issued by "the corresponding religious authority," in this case the Bishop of San Bernardo. The decree also empowers that authority to revoke the certificate of suitability, which Bishop González did.

Consequently, Pavez "could not continue teaching that specific class."

The revocation of the certificate of suitability to teach Catholic religion classes entailed "no negative judgement about the professional competence of Pavez, nor was her right to continue teaching other subjects questioned, even in the same establishment."

"This is in fact what happened, without Pavez losing even for a moment the source of her livelihood, nor was she removed from the school community," the campaign notes.

Pavez sued the Catholic Church for discrimination and filed for an injunction with the San Miguel Court of Appeals. The court denied the injunction, ruling that the revocation was neither illegal nor arbitrary, and Chile's Supreme Court confirmed the appeal court's decision.

In 2008, the teacher took her case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights based in Washington, D.C, "which agreed with her, stating that she has the right to teach Catholic religion classes even against the objection of her church and that the faith communities cannot require teachers' conduct to be faithful to their beliefs, not even in private schools."

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights, located in Costa Rica, now has the case, with a decision forthcoming some time in 2021.

Both the Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court are organs of the OAS to protect human rights in the hemisphere.

Those signing the petition hope that the court will consider "all the interests and rights involved, since we know that what it decides in this case may create ramifications that will extend to the exercise and enjoyment of our rights in the states we live in," the campaign states.

ADF International warns the decision will determine whether religious schools "will be able to ensure that their religious educators fulfill their obligation of fidelity ... that they voluntarily profess."

In addition, the decision will also determine "whether states will respect the right of parents to have their children receive a religious education that is consistent with their convictions." "International human rights law recognizes as a central element in the teaching of religion - which is a manifestation of freedom of religion - the freedom of each religious community to choose who will teach it on their behalf."

Likewise, "human rights treaties also recognize for us, parents, the freedom and right to guarantee that our children receive a moral and religious education that is in accordance with our convictions," the campaign adds.

"By virtue of our freedom of religion, we have an expressly recognized and protected right to spread our faith, starting with ensuring that it will be transmitted to our children." Signers of the petition consider the "consistency of life" of those who teach religion to be "absolutely central."

COLOMBIA: More than 60 LGBT, intersex people killed in Colombia in first eight months of 2020

Violent incidents rose during the coronavirus as the pandemic heightened prejudice and threw up new barriers to justice, the human rights ombudsman said.

Reuters (15.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3hSFCwN> - At least 63 members of Colombia's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community were killed in the first eight months of this year, the Andean country's human rights ombudsman said on Tuesday, while other acts of violence also increased.

Among those killed were 17 transgender women, 12 gay men, six lesbian women and one transgender man, as well as others whose sexual orientation and gender identity could not be specified, although they belonged to the LGBT and intersex community, the organization said.

Intersex refers to people who have reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not conform to typical definitions of male or female.

The ombudsman, an independent organization that promotes human rights in Colombia, did not immediately include comparative figures from the same period in 2019 as collection of the information started this year.

From January to August, the organization reported 388 cases of violence against LGBT and intersex people, mostly in the form of physical and psychological aggressions, up from 309 cases in the whole of last year.

"During the pandemic prejudice and discrimination have been exacerbated while obstacles to accessing justice in the receiving of complaints increased," the ombudsman said in a statement.

The organization, which also cited 36 cases of aggression by police officers, called on the government to develop a concrete action plan to stop violence due to prejudice and fight institutional discrimination that affects this community in all areas and spaces.

COSTA RICA is the latest country to legalize same-sex marriage

By Associated Press

LA Times (26.05.2020) - <https://lat.ms/2A3AXbg> - Costa Rica became the latest country to legalize same-sex marriage Tuesday when a ruling from its supreme court went into effect ending the country's ban.

Couples scheduled ceremonies — mostly private because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but some that would be broadcast — to celebrate their unions before judges and notaries after the ban was lifted at midnight.

Costa Rica is the sixth country in Latin America to legalize same-sex marriage, following most recently Ecuador, which allowed it last year. Same-sex marriage is also permitted in some parts of Mexico.

The issue took center stage in Costa Rica's 2018 presidential election after the Inter-American Court of Human Rights earlier that year issued an opinion that countries such as Costa Rica, which had signed the American Convention on Human Rights, had to move immediately to legalize gay marriage.

It helped propel President Carlos Alvarado to victory over an evangelical candidate, Fabricio Alvarado, who had campaigned against it.

In August 2018, Costa Rica's supreme court said the country's ban was unconstitutional and gave the congress 18 months to correct it or it would happen automatically. The Legislative Assembly did not act, so at midnight Monday night the law banning same-sex marriage was nullified.

A campaign celebrating the achievement called "I Do" planned a series of events, including hours of coverage on state television and messages from celebrities, including Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and former president of Chile.

Gia Miranda, director of the "I Do" campaign, said coverage would also include historical chapters of the movement in Costa Rica.

"It gives us so much joy," Miranda said. "The only thing that could win with this is Costa Rica and in general love."

She said the end of the ban would help decrease discrimination and make the country more prosperous and attractive to tourists.

COSTA RICA lawmakers criticize efforts to delay gay marriage

Costa Rica is set to become the first country in Central America to approve gay marriage.

By Oscar Lopez

Thomson Reuters Foundation (14.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3g9IHsP> - Lawmakers and government officials in Costa Rica on Wednesday chided fellow politicians trying to delay a landmark gay marriage ruling from taking effect, an effort which ended in a punch-up between members of a leading political party.

Costa Rica's constitutional court voted in August 2018 to legalize gay marriage, with the ruling to take effect on May 26 of this year.

The decision made Costa Rica the first country in socially conservative Central America to recognize that right of same sex couples to marry.

On Tuesday, more than 20 lawmakers attempted to introduce a motion to delay the ruling another 18 months, arguing legislators had not had enough time to review the decision because of other issues, including the novel coronavirus.

Rights activists, politicians and government officials say the push from conservatives to delay same-sex marriage detracted from efforts to address the pandemic, given the constitutional court has ruled on the matter.

"There are many other issues that we as a country need to resolve, especially in the face of the emergency we are confronting due to the global pandemic," said Luis Salazar, presidential commissioner for LGBTI population affairs.

"It's a waste of time in the sense that the issue is ... settled," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The dispute came to blows on Tuesday, when deputy David Gourzong of the National Liberation Party (PLN) physically attacked the legal advisor to fellow PLN deputy Gustavo Viales, local media reported.

Gourzong apologized on Twitter late Tuesday, tweeting: "It's clear to me that neither verbal nor physical violence is the way to resolve differences."

Lawmakers would need 38 votes in Costa Rica's 57-member assembly to bring the issue to the top of the agenda; otherwise it is unlikely to be taken up before the May 26 deadline.

Enrique Sanchez, Costa Rica's first openly gay congressman with the center-left Citizens' Action Party, said there was little chance of conservatives gaining the necessary majority.

"It's been a shameful spectacle," he said.

"It gives me peace of mind that this will possibly die from tomorrow, and there will be no going back."

Legalizing gay marriage was a major campaign promise by President Carlos Alvarado Quesada, who took office in 2018.

Rights activists fear that reopening the issue could re-ignite the fierce debate that roiled the election.

"The moment the topic is placed on the table again and the (country's) polarization is exposed, hate speech starts to rise and physical assaults begin," said Margarita Salas, an LGBT+ rights campaigner and president of the VAMOS political party.

"It seems like a reflection of deep homophobia that, in the midst of a pandemic, they want to reopen these issues."

Same-sex marriage has become increasingly accepted in Latin America, with gay couples allowed to marry in Argentina, Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay and parts of Mexico.

ECUADOR's LGBT+ community seen suffering deadliest year in a decade

By Oscar Lopez

Thomson Reuters Foundation (21.01.2020) - <https://reut.rs/2RREWwC> - Last year was the deadliest in at least a decade for gay and transgender people in Ecuador, campaigners have said, citing a possible backlash against new laws enshrining LGBT+ rights.

There were 16 murders or violent deaths involving LGBT+ people in the South American country in 2019, according to a report released by the Ecuadorian LGBT+ rights group Silueta X Association.

The group said it was the highest number since it began keeping track in 2010 and most of the victims were transgender women. In 2018 it registered two LGBT+ murders.

"As the year went on, we were realizing that the statistics of murders were terrible," said Diane Rodriguez, director of Silueta X and president of the Ecuadorian Federation of LGBTI Organizations.

"It's tough seeing images of someone looking happy on social media, and then all of a sudden they're gone," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation on Monday.

Rodriguez, who was the first trans woman elected to Ecuador's National Assembly, said the legalization last year of same-sex marriage in the conservative, mainly Catholic country may have had "a negative impact".

That followed a move by Ecuador's top court in 2018 to legally acknowledge a lesbian couple as parents for the first time, while a law passed in 2016 allowed trans people to change their gender identity legally without having surgery.

Murders of LGBT+ people also rose in 1998 after homosexuality was decriminalized, Rodriguez said.

For the study, researchers monitored media reports of LGBT+ deaths, as well as complaints lodged with Silueta X directly.

LGBT+ rights expert Javier Corrales said the rise in killings may signal a backlash.

"When there is a major change in public policy toward LGBT communities ... homophobic and transphobic arguments increase in frequency and maybe even intensity," said Corrales, professor of political science at Amherst College in the United States.

"We have reason to think that an expansion of hate speech can lead to increases in hate crimes," he said via email.

Attacks against LGBT+ people are common across Latin America, where conservative religious values and widespread violence can be a deadly mix.

In 2019 almost 40% of trans killings worldwide took place in Brazil, according to the Trans Murder Monitoring research project, from advocacy group Transgender Europe.

Meanwhile, Mexico's National Observatory for Hate Crimes Against LGBT People recorded 57 murders of gay or transgender people last year.

EL SALVADOR: No safe haven for LGBT people in El Salvador

Strengthen protections, end asylum pact with US.

By Neela Ghoshal

HRW (08.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3qkN5ZV> - Salvadoran president Nayib Bukele agreed on December 15 to implement an Asylum Cooperative Agreement with the US government. It allows US immigration authorities to transfer non-Salvadoran asylum seekers to El Salvador, instead of allowing them to seek asylum in the US.

US President-elect Joe Biden has pledged to terminate the deeply flawed agreement, a deeply flawed deal that presupposes El Salvador can provide a full and fair asylum procedure and protect refugees. But for some groups, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, El Salvador provides no safe haven. Its own LGBT citizens lack protection from violence and discrimination.

A recent Human Rights Watch report confirms the Salvadoran government's own acknowledgment that LGBT people face "torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, excessive use of force, illegal and arbitrary arrests and other forms of abuse, much of it committed by public security agents." Social and economic marginalization further increase the risk of violence. Many LGBT people flee from home.

Between January 2007 and November 2017, over 1,200 Salvadorans sought asylum in the US due to fear of persecution for their sexual orientation or gender identity. In a groundbreaking judgment, a UK court recently granted asylum to a non-binary Salvadoran, finding that their gender expression exposed them to police violence and daily abuse and degradation.

Five years ago, El Salvador seemed poised to champion LGBT rights. It joined the UN LGBTI Core Group. It increased sentences for bias-motivated crimes. Its Sexual Diversity Directorate trained public servants and monitored government policies for LGBT inclusiveness.

Bukele, then a local official, pledged to be "on the right side of history" on LGBT rights. When he ran for president, his promises dissolved. He opposed marriage equality, effectively shut down the government's sexual diversity work, and refused to support legal gender recognition for trans people. Despite the landmark conviction of three police officers in July for killing a trans woman, violence remains commonplace, and justice out of reach, for many LGBT people.

The Salvadoran government should back a gender identity law and comprehensive civil non-discrimination legislation, prosecute anti-LGBT hate crimes, and reestablish a well-resourced office to promote inclusion and eradicate anti-LGBT violence. It should axe the Asylum Cooperative Agreement.

As things stand, El Salvador fails to provide effective protection to its own LGBT citizens, let alone LGBT people fleeing persecution elsewhere.

EL SALVADOR: Murder trial for El Salvador transgender woman to proceed

Deported from the US to her death.

By Cristian González Cabrera

HRW (11.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2IRRjEV> - An investigating judge in San Salvador ruled today that a criminal case against three police officers charged with aggravated homicide of Camila Díaz Córdova, a transgender woman murdered in January 2019, can proceed to trial. Much to the chagrin of trans activists, the charges of unlawful deprivation of liberty, as well as the classification of the murder as a hate crime based on gender identity under a hate crimes law that went into effect in 2015, will not go forward.

Prosecutors allege that the police officers detained Camila and brutally assaulted her in a pickup truck before throwing her out of the moving vehicle. Camila's case has become a clarion call for justice and accountability for anti-trans violence in El Salvador, where at least seven transgender women have been murdered in the last five months: Anahy Miranda Rivas, Jade Camila Díaz, Victoria Pineda, D. Rosa Granados, Cristi Conde Vásquez, Briyit Michelle Alas, and Tita. Human Rights Watch has interviewed other Salvadoran trans women who have described horrific physical and sexual violence at the hands of gang members, neighbors, and the police.

Camila's case also underscores the hazards of hostile United States asylum policies. Camila tried repeatedly to flee the anti-trans violence she faced in El Salvador (and later in Guatemala and Mexico). When she finally reached the US in August 2017, immigration authorities detained her and subsequently deported her in November. Just over a year later, she was killed – one of many Salvadorans deported from the US who have since been murdered.

A successful and effective prosecution for Camila's murder may help deter further violence against transgender women in El Salvador. In addition, Salvadorans who wish to claim asylum in the US should be given a fair chance to do so and present the case about the persecution they face. This could be a step to ensuring that Camila's murder is the beginning of the end to violence against other trans women in El Salvador.

MEXICO's top court to vote on gay marriage in Yucatan state

If the Supreme Court orders Yucatan state to legalize same-sex marriage, other states across Mexico could follow

by Christine Murray

Openly News (24.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3bBUUou> - Mexico's top court is due to vote Wednesday whether to order the state of Yucatan to legalize gay marriage, a move that would open the door to similar judgments elsewhere in the country.

The Supreme Court in 2015 said that banning gay marriage was unconstitutional, but many states have yet to amend their laws. Some allow same-sex unions while in others gay and lesbian couples must ask a judge to approve their application to marry.

The state Congress in southeastern Yucatan rejected a 2019 initiative to allow equal marriage - a decision that LGBT+ rights group Colectivo por la Proteccion de Todas las Familias en Yucatan (Colectivo PTFY) is now challenging.

"It would be a historic, social revindication after more than 20 years of different organizations ... fighting for this cause in the Yucatan," Kalycho Escoffie, a lawyer with the collective, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

An increasing number of countries in traditionally Catholic Latin America have legalized same-sex marriage. Gay couples can now marry in Costa Rica, Argentina, Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay and in some states in Mexico.

If the Supreme Court decides on Wednesday that Yucatan must legalize same-sex unions, similar cases could be brought in the remaining 11 of Mexico's 31 states that do not allow gay marriage, Escoffie said.

LGBT+ people in Mexico face discrimination in access to education, work and health and families with same-sex partners who cannot marry are blocked from a range of rights and social benefits.

About 3% of people surveyed told Mexico's statistics body in 2017 that they were not heterosexual, although government anti-discrimination body CONAPRED said the true number is likely to be higher.

MEXICO 'My spirit broken': Mexicans battle to ban conversion therapy

In Mexico, LGBT+ people often are subjected to conversion therapy aimed at trying to change their sexual orientation or gender identity, but now lawmakers want it to stop.

By Oscar Lopez

Thomson Reuters Foundation (17.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/32maakF> - When she was 15 years old, Paola Santillan was raped by two men who claimed they would "take the lesbian" out of her. She kept the experience a secret for 10 years.

"I lived that stage of my life in confinement. I lived it in fear, with uncertainty, with the promise of having my spirit broken," the 27-year-old said. "Everything changed in that moment."

Santillan is one of an untold number of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Mexico who have undergone traumatic experiences aimed at altering their sexual orientation or gender identity in what is known as conversion therapy.

Widely condemned by leading medical groups, including the World Psychiatric Association, conversion therapy can range from psychological counseling to religious practices and even sexual abuse in an effort to change someone from gay to straight.

Official statistics on conversion therapy in Mexico are not widely available, but mental health experts and rights activists say the practice is widespread.

"This has become fairly normalized in our society," Ivan Tagle, director general of advocacy group Yaaj told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Up to six out of every 10 young people who come to Yaaj have endured conversion therapy, he said.

The United Nations has called for a global ban on the practice, but worldwide, only a handful of countries - Brazil, Ecuador and Malta - have nationwide bans.

This month, Queensland became the first state in Australia to outlaw conversion therapy, and in July, Mexico City became the country's first jurisdiction to do so, with providers facing up to five years in prison.

But now supporters are pushing for Mexico to take the law nationwide.

A bill to ban the practice nationally was approved by Senate committees earlier this year, and lawmakers say a vote by the full chamber will take place next month.

"When I found out that these tortuous and inhumane practices existed ... I decided work on the issue," said Citlalli Hernandez, a senator with the ruling Morena party who has championed the bill.

If the measure is approved by the Senate, Hernandez said she hopes it will pass to the House of Deputies by November. Then it will need approval from the Morena-controlled lower chamber before moving to the president's desk for signature.

'A good Christian'

In a socially conservative country where the Catholic church is often critical of gay rights, LGBT+ issues are divisive and for many, being gay or trans in Mexico means enduring violence and discrimination.

According to a 2016 study from Yaaj, more than a third of Mexican LGBT+ young people had experienced psychological abuse, while a fifth had suffered physical violence.

Facing a life of difficulty, many young LGBT+ people seek out conversion therapy themselves or are forced into such treatment by their parents, according to mental health experts and rights advocates.

Conversion therapies are often offered by religious groups in Mexico, where 80% of the population identifies as Catholic. Many others are members of evangelical Christian churches.

"In Mexico it works because of the guilt ... of not being a 'good Christian'," said Jonathan Silva, a psychology professor at the IBERO University who treats conversion therapy survivors.

Carmen Francisco, 33, said she started going to conversion therapy 10 years ago at an evangelical church because of the guilt she felt being in a relationship with another woman.

"Being a Christian ... I felt bad, like I was doing something wrong," she said.

At times, she said she thought the process was working, and she went four years without dating women.

But she paid a steep price, particularly when sessions devolved into exorcisms with her 'therapist' speaking in tongues.

"I would ask God to change me," Francisco recalled. "I remember sessions where I would end up kneeling on the floor crying, and I even remember times when I would end up vomiting."

According to Silva, many interventions take place at intense weekend religious retreats.

"Having three days where someone tells you that ... your life identity is nothing more than a sin, a piece of shit, the scum of humanity, has very long-term implications," he said.

Trans woman Jazz Bustamante said despite surviving an earlier experience with conversion therapy at a Pentecostal church, she went on a religious retreat at age 21 in her own "spiritual quest".

Over three sleepless nights, Bustamante was told to write down her whole life story on pieces of paper.

On the final night, someone identified as a "godfather" took her aside for a ceremony with candles and incense, where she was told to burn every page and ask God for forgiveness.

The experience proved traumatic.

"The depression and anxiety attacks worsened," Bustamante said. "There were emotional complications."

'The survivors'

LGBT+ people are also sent for conversion therapy at Mexico's church-funded addiction treatment and rehabilitation centers, rights advocates say.

"They might not promote it in their advertising, but there are these networks for admitting people for (being LGBT+)," said Alex Orue, executive director of youth suicide prevention group It Gets Better Mexico.

In places with actual drug addicts and often administered by men, young LGBT+ people, especially lesbian and bisexual women and girls are "easy prey," said Orue.

"There are many reports of these 'corrective' rapes."

Mexico's rampant machismo can make such sexual abuse seem permissible, mental health experts say.

"There is a certain 'authorization' for men ... to impinge on the life and the body of a woman," said Silva, the psychology professor.

But whether the intervention is sexual, psychological or spiritual, the consequences can be devastating.

"Everything points to a destruction of any possibility of an identity for a person," Silva said.

For Santillan, after getting raped for being a lesbian, it took a decade before she could talk about it.

Now sharing her story and campaigning for a conversion therapy ban has given her new purpose.

"I made the personal political," Santillan said. "Now it's me who also listens to other testimonies and gives a voice to the survivors that we are."

MEXICO sees deadliest year for LGBT+ people in five years

In 2019, 117 lesbian, gay, bi and trans people were killed in Mexico.

By Oscar Lopez

Thomson Reuters Foundation (15.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2ZBiPA2> - Mexico is seeing a surge of extreme violence toward LGBT+ people in its deadliest year in half a decade, a leading rights group said on Friday, citing cases of victims brutally stabbed and brazenly killed in public.

In 2019, 117 lesbian, gay, bi and trans people were killed in Mexico, up almost a third compared with 2018 and the highest number since 2015, according to LGBT+ advocacy group Letra S.

Overall in Mexico, last year was the deadliest on record, but the increase among the gay and trans community was more severe, said Alejandro Brito, Letra S director.

"We've documented that victims are subjected to multiple forms of violence, before or even after they were murdered," Brito said.

"There is a cruelty towards the victims," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Victims have been found handcuffed, stabbed repeatedly and in public places, he said.

A lesbian woman was killed while out one night with her girlfriend in the city of Cuernavaca, and the bodies of several murdered trans women were found on the streets.

Amid widespread gang violence and drug trafficking groups in Mexico, more than 34,500 homicide victims were reported last year, according to official data. But while the number of murder victims was up 2.5% in 2019, the number of gay and trans people killed was 27% higher than in 2018, said Letra S.

More than half the victims were transgender women, while nearly a third were gay men. At least 441 LGBT+ people were murdered in Mexico between 2015 and 2019, the group said.

LGBT+ rights have grown stronger in Mexico, with discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation outlawed since 2003. The country was the second to implement such a law in Latin America after Ecuador.

More than half of Mexico's 32 states recognize gay marriage, and the nation's top court has ruled that trans people have a legal right to change their gender identity on official documents.

Brito said the increasing visibility afforded by advances in LGBT+ issues may have contributed to the surging violence.

The violence "is specifically directed at LGBT people," he said.

"The greater visibility ... has led macho groups, fundamentalist sectors to reject this public presence of gays, lesbians and trans people."

Gay and trans people still face societal prejudice in the predominantly Catholic country where religious groups frequently criticize LGBT+ rights.

In a 2017 government survey, about a third of Mexicans said they would not rent out a room to a gay or trans person. Lawmakers welcomed the data for highlighting the often underreported violence faced by LGBT+ people in Mexico.

"Hate crimes due to homophobia and transphobia are generally made invisible," said Patricia Mercado, a senator with the opposition Citizens' Movement party. "We have to continue working to prevent all forms of discrimination that can lead to a hate crime."

The data on murders was based on news reports of LGBT+ killings, but the actual number could be much higher, according to Letra S.

MEXICO: Queer couples stage kiss-in protest in shopping mall after security banned two gay men from holding hands

Unfurling a sprawling LGBT+ Pride flag, protesters packed a shopping mall in Mexico on Sunday after security staff banned a gay couple from kissing and holding hands.

By Josh Milton

Pink News (02.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3cOsqHK> - "Love is love!" the demonstrators chanted as they walked by luxury fashion stores and coffee house chains, kissing one another and waving flags as shoppers exchanged quizzical looks.

The Besotón vs Homofobia 2020 march was held in defiance after Galerías Monterrey, Monterrey, security officers demanded a gay couple stop kissing in the plaza.

Jorge and Iván were waiting in the square until a movie started in the cinema nearby when the patrolling guards cornered them and asked them to leave.

Officers asked if the couple "could not be groping" outside in case children see them, Jorge, one half of the couple, claimed in a viral Facebook video.

Regias del Drag, a drag queen collective in the northern city, organised the protest to openly defy the guards who, Jorde said, claimed they were "only following orders".

At around 3pm, the shopping center of the plaza was paralyzed by the impassioned protesters, who rolled out rainbow banners and draped flags around them as capes. Some hoisted poles with unmissable trans-inclusive gender symbols on top.

Chants of "education is the option", "no to discrimination" and "not a step back" echoed across the canyon of shops as protesters descended down the escalators.

The group, which included Jorge and Iván alongside dozens of supporters and drag queens, later spilled into one of the major walkways of the shopping mall and kissed and embraced one another. A circle of supporters cheering each on.

LGBT+ rights in Mexico

Mexico City, a liberal island in the vastly conservative United Mexican States, first paved the way for marriage equality and a seismic shift towards acceptance in Latin America in 2009.

In breaking long-held taboos around homosexuality, the jurisdiction became the first to legalise same-sex marriage.

Years on, and each of the 31 states of Mexico have unique codes around marriage, forming a patchwork of states that have various degrees of marriage equality but, overall, it is not illegal.

Moreover, LGBT+ citizens enjoy study anti-discrimination laws and acceptance is on the up. Although, rights around parenthood and the military remain in limbo.

Some bills are still pending, clogging the Congress of Mexico, while others, such as banning conversion therapy, are proposed.

Furthermore, in 2019, Mexico was considered the world's second-deadliest country for trans people.

A study by Mexican LGBT+ rights organisation Letra Ese has shown that, between 2013 and 2016, at least 473 LGBT+ people have been killed in the country, and 261 of these were trans women.

According to the report, the last two years have been the most violent, with a 30 per cent increase in the number of murders in relation to the average of previous years.

USA: Presbyterian Church in America takes first vote on banning ordination of openly gay men

By Anugrah Kumar

The Christian Post (04.07.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2SNNbhP> - The Presbyterian Church in America has voted to change a rule in its governing document that would disqualify all gay men from serving in its ministry.

The resolution to change the rule, "Overture 23," was passed 1,400-400 at the denomination's 48th annual convention in St. Louis, Missouri, last week.

"Officers in the Presbyterian Church in America must be above reproach in their walk and Christlike in their character. Those who profess an identity (such as, but not limited to, 'gay Christian,' 'same-sex attracted Christian,' 'homosexual Christian,' or like terms) that undermines or contradicts their identity as new creations in Christ, either by denying the sinfulness of fallen desires (such as, but not limited to, same-sex attraction), or by denying the reality and hope of progressive sanctification, or by failing to pursue Spirit-empowered victory over their sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions are not qualified for ordained office," the amended rule states.

The amended rule will go to local church bodies for a vote before the second round of convention balloting next year following which the language would be placed in the PCA's "Book of Church Order."

The Washington Times quoted Chris Norris of the Calvary Presbytery as saying during the debate: "Sanctification begins with one's identity as a new creation in Christ. ... Taking a gay identity flies in the face of the new creation."

The denomination also affirmed "Overture 37," which refers to pastoral candidates.

"...Careful reflection must be given to his practical struggle against sinful actions, as well as to persistent sinful desires," it states.

"The candidate must give clear testimony of reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits thereof by the Holy Spirit, depending on this work of grace to make progress over sin. ... While imperfection will remain, he should not be known by reputation or self-profession according to his remaining sinfulness (e.g., homosexual desires, etc.), but rather by the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus," it adds.

During the annual convention, the PCA also endorsed Lifeline Children's Services as its "preferred adoption and orphan care ministry" due to its "commitment to the sanctity of life" and not Bethany Christian Services, which recently announced it would be offering its services to LGBT couples.

The endorsement of Lifeline came three months after the Michigan-based group Bethany, which is the nation's largest Protestant adoption and foster agency, announced it would begin placing children with adults who identify as LGBT.

In a statement to The Christian Post at the time, Nathan Bult, senior vice president of the historically evangelical organization, said that faith in Jesus is at the "core" of their mission," but they were "not claiming a position" on the various doctrinal issues about which Christians may disagree."

USA: At least four teens have attempted suicide after Arkansas bans trans youth from getting healthcare

"Families are in a state of panic, asking what state should they move to. They want to know what they should do next and we don't have a clear answer for them."

By Alex Bollinger

LGBTQ Nation (19.04.2021) - <https://bit.ly/32DUrhC> - At least four transgender teens at one clinic in Arkansas have reportedly attempted suicide in the two weeks since the [state banned gender-affirming health care for transgender minors](#).

"My families are in a state of panic, asking what state should they move to, saying their child is threatening to kill themselves," [Dr. Michele Hutchison told CTV](#). "They want to know what they should do next and we don't have a clear answer for them."

Dr. Hutchison would know. She runs a clinic that has helped 200 families in the state access age-appropriate medical care for transgender youth. Her clinic is the biggest provider of puberty blockers and hormone therapy in the state.

Dylan Brandt is a 15-year-old transgender boy who started testosterone several months ago. He and his mother said that he's more confident and outgoing now.

But the state just passed a law banning doctors from providing gender-affirming care to minors. [Gov. Asa Hutchinson \(R\) vetoed the bill](#), saying, "Government under a conservative philosophy should be restrained." His argument was that doctors and families should be left alone to decide what the best health care option is.

The GOP-dominated state legislature overrode his veto, making it the first state to pass such an extreme anti-transgender law and it's set to go into effect this summer.

"The thought of having to go back to how I was before this is just devastating because that would set me back on everything," Brandt said. "I don't want to go back."

The law has already made transgender youth and their families afraid, and they're looking for solutions. Brandt's family can't afford to move, but they're close enough to the border with Oklahoma that they may cross state lines to get medical treatment because, Brandt's mother said, ending his hormone therapy "isn't a viable option."

Dr. Hutchison is worried that families will also turn to the black market.

"They're going to find a way to get them, and it's going to be dangerous because they won't be monitored for side effects," she said.

Others may not have the resources to do even that.

"You're basically kicking these people when they're down," Dr. Stephanie Ho said. She has cared for about a dozen trans teens in the past. "They have very little resources to begin with and now you're going to make them choose between rent and their child's life."

One of the treatments banned by the law is puberty blockers, which are medications that delay the onset of puberty so that trans teens and their families and doctors have more time to figure out the best course of action before the permanent – and dysphoric – effects of puberty happen. They're reversible if someone stops taking them.

[One study found that transgender teens](#) who wanted puberty blockers and were able to get them had a significantly reduced risk of suicidal thoughts for the rest of their lives compared to trans teens who wanted them but didn't get them. [Another study found](#) that the treatment improves transgender youths' outlooks on life.

The law also banned hormone therapy and other medical treatments for trans youth. While it also technically banned gender-affirming surgery, that is already not something performed on minors.

In addition to potentially losing access to life-saving medication, the legislation showed the state's contempt for transgender people. Studies have already [connected discriminatory laws and teen suicide](#).

At least 20 other states are considering similar legislation and could follow similar paths to Arkansas.

Arkansas has already passed two other anti-LGBTQ bills this year, including a ban on transgender girls and women in school sports.

The other bill expanded religious exemptions for healthcare workers, a law that could make it legal for a doctor to refuse to provide care for LGBTQ people.

The religious exemptions law expands what health care providers are allowed to do under the law, while the gender-affirming healthcare ban restricts providers by threatening their

licenses, insurance, and state funding if they provide treatment in accordance with mainstream science.

The group Doctors For Change [released an open letter](#) to the sponsors of similar legislation in Texas pointing out that the bill flies in the face of medical research and standards of care.

"The care provided to children and youth with gender dysphoria is tailored to their specific needs by a team of highly trained providers, including pediatricians, mental health specialists, endocrinologists, surgeons, and allies and supporters including parents and guardians," they wrote. "Each provider plays a role in ensuring the health of the child based on established standards of care and the peer-reviewed medical literature."

"In our experience, affirmation and acceptance from parents, guardians, physicians, and all other important adults in a child's life is extremely beneficial to the child's health outcomes and happiness. These benefits are also supported overwhelmingly by the medical literature and highly respected pediatric organizations including the *Texas Pediatric Society*, *American Academy of Pediatrics*, and *Pediatric Endocrine Society*."

Arkansas is also currently considering a bill to block transgender people from using the facilities associated with their gender.

USA: Trump administration again weakens LGBT protections

Congress should reject rule, ensure equal access to health and welfare programs.

By Ryan Thoreson

HRW (08.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/38Dotpk> - With less than two weeks left in office, the administration of US President Donald Trump has finalized yet another rule rolling back nondiscrimination protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people seeking the services of health and welfare programs funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services.

Previously, a federal regulation expressly prohibited health and welfare programs receiving federal funding from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. But the administration's new rule, first proposed in 2019, erases this language. It also deletes a requirement that recipients recognize the marriages of same-sex couples, replacing it with a generic statement that the US Department of Health and Human Services will respect Supreme Court decisions.

The previous regulation was used to ensure adoption and foster care agencies who receive federal support serve all qualified parents, including same-sex couples. Rolling back existing nondiscrimination protections will harm those families, as well as the many kids awaiting placement in loving and supportive homes.

In 2019, Human Rights Watch argued that these changes threatened children's rights as well as families' freedom from discrimination and right to health. We've previously documented how these types of changes can function as a license to discriminate, shutting LGBT people out of health and welfare services that should be open to all.

In the coming weeks, Congress should swiftly reject this regressive rule. The Congressional Review Act allows Congress to disapprove of a recently enacted regulation and, with the president's signature, prevent it from taking effect. With an upcoming presidential transition, the US government should take this opportunity to make clear again that the programs it funds are open to all qualified people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

USA: U.S. Christian groups spent \$280m fighting LGBT+ rights, abortion overseas

Right-wing U.S. groups have put more than \$280 million into campaigns against LGBT+ rights and abortion worldwide since 2007, almost \$90 million of which focused on Europe.

By Rachel Savage

Thomson Reuters Foundation (27.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/326bgSf> - Right-wing U.S. groups have put more than \$280 million into campaigns against LGBT+ rights and abortion worldwide since 2007, almost \$90 million of which focused on Europe, according to a [report](#) on Tuesday.

Many of the 28 groups - most of which are Christian - have close links with U.S. President Donald Trump, who is campaigning for re-election on Nov. 3, investigative website openDemocracy found, amid the rising popularity of the far-right in Europe.

"These findings show how Trump-linked groups have built a frightening global empire," Mary Fitzgerald, openDemocracy's editor-in-chief, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in emailed comments.

One of the main groups is the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), whose chief counsel Jay Sekulow is Trump's personal lawyer. It supported a ruling in Poland last week banning abortion in cases of foetal defects, the report said.

The ACLJ - shown through its financial records to have spent \$18 million globally since 2007, 80% of it in Europe - did not respond to a request for comment.

Another major player is the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), whose international arm filed legal briefs against same-sex marriage in Italy and backed a Northern Irish bakery that refused to make a cake with "Support Gay Marriage" on it.

It also opposed same-sex adoption in Austria and trans women in France seeking to legally change their gender by submitting arguments in cases at the European Court of Human Rights.

"ADF International is a global human rights organisation that protects fundamental freedoms and promotes the inherent dignity of all people," a spokeswoman for ADF International said in emailed comments.

"Rather than engaging with our arguments, OpenDemocracy seeks to shut down debate by launching what is nothing more than a smear campaign."

The openDemocracy investigation highlighted a lack of transparency among U.S. church organisations, which do not have to pay taxes, reveal their funders or how they spend their money overseas.

The biggest spender was the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, which poured \$96 million into influencing foreign laws and citizens, although its spending is unknown since 2015 when it was reclassified as a church association.

Its president Franklin Graham - the son of the U.S. evangelical preacher - has praised the LGBT+ rights record of Russia, where homophobic violence has risen since the adoption in 2013 of a ban on "gay propaganda" towards minors.

The association did not respond to a request for comment.

Africa was the second most popular destination for anti-LGBT+ efforts. Several of the groups supported the death penalty for gay sex in Uganda, known as the "Kill The Gays" bill, which was overturned by the country's constitutional court in 2014.

"Trump-linked U.S. evangelicals, funded by secret donors, are exporting homophobia around the world," British LGBT+ activist Peter Tatchell said in emailed comments.

USA: Trump administration doubles down on trans discrimination

US Congress should pass the Equality Act.

By Ryan Thoreson

HRW (25.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2ZngsPB> - The Trump administration is moving ahead with a rule that would write transgender people out of sex discrimination protections in health care. While advocates fight the rule in court, transgender people will continue to face discriminatory treatment and refusals of care.

This comes despite a United States Supreme Court ruling last week that affirmed employment protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, reasoning that gender identity discrimination is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by law.

Human Rights Watch has documented the daunting barriers that transgender people face finding healthcare services. Transgender people often are unable to find care, encounter discrimination or refusals in healthcare settings, or simply avoid seeking care because of concerns they will be mistreated.

When the administration first proposed the new rule in 2019, Human Rights Watch joined thousands of other organizations and individuals in raising its serious concerns with the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Although it received more than 20,000 comments opposing the rule, HHS adopted the regulation, leaving transgender people even more vulnerable to the routine discrimination they already face in healthcare settings.

The rollback of healthcare protections is the latest in a long string of Trump administration attacks on transgender people.

Since 2017, the administration has withdrawn regulatory protections for transgender children in schools, fought recognition of transgender people under federal employment laws, banned transgender people from serving in the military, rolled back protections for transgender people in prisons, and threatened to cut off funding to schools that let transgender girls participate in sports.

The administration's cruel assault on transgender rights shows no signs of letting up. Just after the healthcare regulation was finalized, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development said it would propose a rule permitting single-sex homeless shelters to turn away transgender people.

The Supreme Court's recent decision pulls the rug from under these anti-transgender regulations by making clear that sex, as prohibited grounds for discrimination, includes gender identity. Instead of waiting for the courts to strike them down, the US Senate should pass the Equality Act, which would expressly protect transgender people from discrimination in employment, housing, federally funded programs, and other domains. As the past week shows, unless lawmakers take action, the administration will continue its campaign to deprive transgender people of their fundamental rights.

USA: Supreme Court rules federal civil rights law protects LGBTQ workers

By Melissa Quinn

CBS News (15.06.2020) - <https://cbsn.ws/2AFab9B> - The U.S. Supreme Court ruled Monday that it is illegal for an employer to fire someone because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, delivering a major victory in the fight for civil rights for LGBTQ people.

The court's 6-3 ruling extends the scope of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which bars discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin and religion, to include LGBTQ people. Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Neil Gorsuch, who authored the majority's opinion, joined the liberal wing of the bench in ruling that "an employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender violates Title VII."

"Judges are not free to overlook plain statutory commands on the strength of nothing more than suppositions about intentions or guesswork about expectations," Gorsuch wrote. "In Title VII, Congress adopted broad language making it illegal for an employer to rely on an employee's sex when deciding to fire that employee. We do not hesitate to recognize today a necessary consequence of that legislative choice: An employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender defies the law."

The cases involving Title VII, of which there were three before the court, were the first involving LGBTQ rights to reach the justices since the retirement of Justice Anthony Kennedy in 2018. Kennedy authored the majority opinions in all major gay rights cases decided by the court, and President Trump replaced him with Justice Brett Kavanaugh, an appointment that shifted the court rightward.

The justices heard oral arguments in the legal battle over Title VII at the start of its term in October, during which Gorsuch, appointed to the high court by Mr. Trump, emerged as the likely swing vote.

Two of the three cases before the court involved gay men who said they were fired because of their sexual orientation.

Donald Zarda, who has since died, worked as a skydiving instructor in New York and argued he was fired after a woman accused him of touching her inappropriately and telling her he was gay during a tandem skydive in 2010.

Zarda filed a charge with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) arguing he was discriminated against because of his sexual orientation and gender. He then sued his employer, Altitude Express, in federal district court in New York, alleging his firing violated Title VII.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sided with Zarda, finding "sexual orientation discrimination is motivated, at least in part, by sex and is thus a subset of sex discrimination for purposes of Title VII."

Like Zarda, Gerald Bostock, a child welfare services coordinator for the Clayton County Juvenile Court System in Georgia, said he lost his job because of his sexual orientation. Bostock was fired for "conduct unbecoming of a county employee" after he started participating in a gay recreational softball league in 2013.

Bostock sued Clayton County, alleging he was fired because of his sexual orientation in violation of Title VII. The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the district court's dismissal of the case.

The third legal battle before the justices raised the question of whether Title VII prohibits discrimination based on gender identity.

At the center of the case is Aimee Stephens, a transgender woman, who was fired from R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes in Michigan after she told her employer in 2013 she suffered from gender dysphoria and would dress as a woman at work. Stephens died in May.

Stephens filed a discrimination charge with the EEOC arguing she was illegally fired based on sex and gender identity in violation of Title VII. The EEOC then filed suit against the funeral home.

The federal district court ruled for Harris Homes, but the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sided with Stephens. In its ruling, the lower court said "discrimination on the basis of transgender ... status violates Title VII."

In a dissenting opinion on Monday, Justice Samuel Alito, joined by Justice Clarence Thomas, accused the majority of legislating from the bench and likened the opinion to "a pirate ship" that "sails under a textualist flag."

"There is only one word for what the Court has done today: legislation," he wrote. "The document that the Court releases is in the form of a judicial opinion interpreting a statute, but that is deceptive."

In a separate dissent, Kavanaugh said it's the role of Congress and the president, not the court, to alter Title VII.

"When this Court usurps the role of Congress, as it does today, the public understandably becomes confused about who the policymakers really are in our system of separated powers, and inevitably becomes cynical about the oft-repeated aspiration that judges base their decisions on law rather than on personal preference," Kavanaugh wrote. "The best way for judges to demonstrate that we are deciding cases based on the ordinary meaning of the law is to walk the walk, even in the hard cases when we might prefer a different policy outcome."

Mr. Trump told reporters at the White House the decision from the high court was "very powerful," adding, "they've ruled and we live with the decision."

The Supreme Court's ruling was cheered by former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, who called it a "momentous step forward for our country."

"Today, by affirming that sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination are prohibited under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Supreme Court has confirmed the simple but profoundly American idea that every human being should be treated with respect and dignity," he said in a statement.

The cases before the court pitted the Trump administration against the EEOC, which has said Title VII's protections extend to LGBTQ people. The Justice Department, however, believes Congress needed to clarify the reach of the law.

USA: Trump team moves to scrap protections for LGBTQ patients

The health department's top civil rights official also defended the administration's approach to vulnerable populations.

By Dan Diamond

Politico (24.04.2020) - <https://politi.co/2KUxo9o> - The Trump administration is moving to scrap an Obama-era policy that protected LGBTQ patients from discrimination, alarming health experts who warn that the regulatory rollback could harm vulnerable people during a pandemic.

The health department is close to finalizing its long-developing rewrite of Obamacare's Section 1557 provision, which barred health care discrimination based on sex and gender identity. The administration's final rule on Thursday was circulated at DOJ, a step toward publicly releasing the regulation in the coming days, said two people with knowledge of the pending rule. The White House on Friday morning also updated a regulatory dashboard to indicate that the rule was under review. Advocates fear that it would allow hospitals and health workers to more easily discriminate against patients based on their gender or sexual orientation.

The Obama administration moved to create its non-discrimination protections in response to advocates and health care experts who said that LGBTQ patients were being turned away from necessary care or intimidated from seeking it out. The broad rule also offered specific protections for transgender patients for the first time and extended protections for women who had abortions. But a federal judge in 2016 blocked those protections following a lawsuit from religious groups, and the Trump administration has steadily worked to weaken the rule before it could take full effect.

In last year's proposal, the health department also proposed changes that went further than simply rolling back the new Obama protections, moving to eliminate similar nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ patients that were contained in other regulations.

"If the final rule is anything like the proposed rule, HHS is adopting changes that would be harmful in the best of times but that are especially cruel in the midst of a global pandemic that is disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities and exacerbating disparities," said Katie Keith, a lawyer and Georgetown professor who's tracked the rule.

HHS declined to comment on the possibility of a pending rule, and an administration official said that there are no protections to "scrap" given that Texas Judge Reed O'Connor tossed the Obama-era policy last year.

"A federal court has vacated the gender identity provisions of the regulation and we are abiding by that court order," a HHS spokesperson said. "We do not comment on the rulemaking process and refer you to recent public filings made by the Department of Justice before the Supreme Court on what constitutes sex discrimination under civil rights laws."

The health department's top civil rights official also defended the administration's approach to vulnerable populations. "As we have shown in our recent efforts to protect persons from disability and age discrimination during the pandemic, HHS will vigorously enforce civil rights laws as passed by Congress, before, during, and after any rulemaking," Roger Severino, the HHS civil rights chief, said in a statement. He added that the Obama administration "declined to recognize sexual orientation as a protected category under Obamacare, and HHS proposed to leave that judgment undisturbed" in last year's proposed rule. Severino was an active critic of the Obama-era non-discrimination rules before joining the administration.

Any rule issued by the Trump administration on LGBTQ protections could be short-lived. The Supreme Court is set to rule on whether the Civil Rights Act protects LGBTQ workers, which could create a new regulatory framework and force health officials to swiftly return to the drawing board.

Meanwhile, advocates say they're worried that LGBTQ patients could be deterred from seeking care during a public health crisis. The liberal-leaning Center for American Progress published findings that 8 percent of lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults and 29 percent of transgender adults said they had been turned away by a health care provider based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

"I'm really scared about what that means for testing, for treatment, for people's comfort-seeking care," said Sharita Gruberg, who oversees CAP's work on LGBTQ populations. "This is not the time we want people to avoid seeking care and treatment."

USA: The number of anti-LGBTQ hate groups grew 43% in 2019 - White House says that's a "far-left smear"

The White House said that it's "disgusting" to call them out for associating with and promoting anti-LGBTQ hate groups.

By Alex Bollinger

LGBTQ Nation (02.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2xXKY8v> - Anti-LGBTQ hate groups are on the rise in the U.S., according to a new report from the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), but the Trump administration is calling it a "far-left smear."

The SPLC released its 2019 "[Year in Hate and Extremism](#)" report, which says that the number of anti-LGBTQ hate groups rose by 43% since 2018. It is now following 70 anti-LGBTQ hate groups in the U.S.

"The Trump administration has demonstrated a clear willingness to embrace their leaders and their policy agenda," the SPLC report states, referring to how Trump administration officials have filed legal briefs on behalf of hate groups, spoken at events organized by

hate groups, nominated judges connected to hate groups, and even hiring former hate group employees to work in key civil rights positions.

"According to a report by Lambda Legal, a third of the more than 50 U.S. circuit court judges nominated by Trump have a 'demonstrated history of anti-LGBTQ bias,'" the SPLC report says. "Lambda argues that the justice system is 'now indisputably in a state of crisis.'"

The report says that much of the growth in anti-LGBTQ hate groups has taken place "at the grassroots level" and cites Steven Anderson and his Faithful Word Baptist Church as an example. Anderson has been banned from 33 countries due to his hate speech – which includes calling the victims of the Pulse nightclub shooting "disgusting homosexuals... worthy of death" – and his organization was just added to the SPLC's list of hate groups.

Out White House deputy press secretary Judd Deere – who is on-board when it comes to Trump's anti-LGBTQ equality agenda – called the report "disgusting."

"While the radical left has pushed false accusations that LGBTQ Americans are threatened, the president has hired and promoted LGBTQ Americans to the highest levels of government, including positions at the White House, Cabinet agencies, and ambassadorships," Deere told NBC News.

Deere also cites Trump's "global campaign to decriminalize homosexuality" – an initiative that the White House announced but took few discernible steps to advance and that has had no successes – and his "bold declaration" to end HIV transmissions in the next 10 years, a promise experts are skeptical Trump's policies will achieve.

One anti-LGBTQ hate group tracked by the SPLC, the Alliance Defending Freedom, said that it was "appalling" to release the report during the coronavirus pandemic and said that the SPLC should "retract the report."

"Stop sowing division and join the rest of America against our common foe: COVID-19," said a spokesperson for ADF, a group that is currently fighting a legal battle to ban transgender girls from competing in school sports.

A group that merely opposes LGBTQ legislation will not appear on the SPLC's list of hate groups. It has to "attack or malign" LGBTQ people in its actions or official communications, often by associating homosexuality with pedophilia, calling for death to LGBTQ people, and saying that LGBTQ people are a threat to children. Hate speech, the SPLC argues, is often a precursor to violence.

"We are not against Christian groups," said the SPLC's Lecia Brooks. "For us, it's more about the way they go out of their way to demonize LGBTQ folks."

"Sadly, there is not enough public outcry against anti-LGBTQ groups because we have just let it go saying, 'That's just their religion.'"

USA: Lawmakers in the US unleash barrage of anti-transgender bills

Proposed laws threaten health, rights of trans kids.

By Ryan Thoreson

HRW (20.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2GaqVor> - Protecting children's health is critical, and that means allowing doctors and their patients to decide what care is needed to keep a child physically and mentally healthy.

Yet on Wednesday, lawmakers in the US state of South Dakota will consider a bill that would make it a felony for healthcare providers to give gender-affirming care to minors. If passed, medical professionals who provide transgender children with puberty blockers, hormones, or other transition-related care would face up to 10 years in prison.

In a cruel twist, the bill makes an exception for doctors and parents to make surgical interventions – whether or not they are necessary – on intersex children, a practice that seriously jeopardizes health and rights. If enacted, the bill would perversely give doctors a free pass to perform medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex infants too young to participate in the decision, but would make it a criminal offense for a doctor to provide medically recommended treatment to an informed transgender 17-year-old seeking care.

This is the sixth year in a row lawmakers in South Dakota have targeted transgender kids, following failed efforts to restrict them from accessing bathrooms and locker rooms, playing sports, and learning about gender identity in schools.

But this year, other states are pursuing a similar path. Lawmakers in Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, South Carolina, and Texas are considering similar bills this session to prevent trans youth from accessing gender-affirming care.

Such bills are a threat to the health and rights of transgender children. Research shows that affirming health care is critically important for the mental health of transgender kids. The American Academy of Pediatrics and other professional groups have therefore recommended a gender-affirming approach, which may include delaying puberty so that young people can make their own decisions about surgical interventions when they turn 18.

Unfortunately, these proposed laws are the tip of the iceberg for attacks on LGBT youth. Across the US, lawmakers are moving ahead with bills to repeal nondiscrimination protections, legalize conversion therapy, exclude transgender kids from athletics, and bar transgender kids from bathrooms and locker rooms.

These bills not only interfere in doctor-patient and parent-child relationships, but flatly ignore transgender and intersex children's rights to health and equal protection of the law. Lawmakers who believe in equality should roundly reject these bills and strengthen efforts to protect children from discrimination.

USA: Judge orders US to return illegally deported gay asylum seeker before he's killed

ICE deported him to Africa before his case had been heard. It may be too late to bring him back now.

By Juwan J. Holmes

LGBTQ Nation (09.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2tTMO8F> - A court has ordered the Department of Homeland Security to allow the return of Oumar Yaide, a gay asylum seeker deported from San Francisco back to Chad before his asylum case could be reheard.

The U.S. Government must work with Yaide's lawyers to "formulate a mutually agreeable plan" that ensures Yaide can return as soon as possible.

Yaide arrived in the United States in 2009 seeking political asylum from his native country due to being a member of the Gorane, a Chadian ethnic group which he claims is "a disfavored group." The application was denied in 2014, and the final appeal was also denied in 2018.

Upon his detainment for deportation, however, Yaide requested to have his case reopened due to homosexuality becoming criminalized by Chad in 2016. Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) agents ignored his pending review and deported him. ICE agents took him from a California prison and flew him in handcuffs from Sacramento to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia before his attorneys were informed.

While Yaide's fear that "torture and death" became closer to becoming reality, his attorneys filed a writ of habeas corpus asking for his return, and a temporary restraining order from deporting him. Judge Charles R. Breyer ruled that the deportation "violates [Yaide's] procedural due process right to pursue his motion to reopen."

Breyer also wrote, "obviously, imprisonment or death would foreclose Yaide's ability to pursue his motion to reopen" regarding ICE knowingly sending Yaide to a country where he faces death for his sexuality.

The Department of Homeland Security claims that Yaide is beyond their jurisdiction now, and so they can't retrieve him. Yaide's Chadian passport is expired and the country may not issue him a new one, court documents show.

Chad is one of an approximate 68 countries in the United Nations where consensual same-sex activity is illegal, according to advocacy group ILGA World. Persecution of LGBTQ+ people has been an accepted basis for some asylum seekers since at least 1994.
