



A Guide to Testifying Against Harmful Bills for Parents and Supportive Adults

Young people are watching.

In the future that The Trevor Project envisions, **young people wouldn't have to witness their rights being debated by elected leaders.** Unfortunately, many states are creating a hostile political landscape for LGBTQ young people across the United States. In 2022, **220 anti-LGBTQ bills were considered in a majority of states across the country** – a record number.

This trend is set to continue, as state houses around America are continuing to consider legislation that targets LGBTQ young people, ranging from censoring certain curricula and **books**, banning transgender student-athletes from participating in **sports** that match their gender identity, to criminalizing **doctors** and families who support young people with gender-affirming **medical care**.

This has a huge impact: in 2021, **94%** of LGBTQ young people reported that recent politics negatively impacted their mental health and **86%** of transgender and nonbinary youth say recent debates about state laws restricting the rights of transgender people have negatively impacted their mental health. A majority of those trans youth (**55%**) said it impacted their mental health “very negatively.”

That’s the bad news. However, there is still reason for optimism: nearly **90%** of harmful bills considered in 2022 were defeated by LGBTQ advocates and allies. These wins don’t just happen organically. They’re a result of targeted grassroots efforts of educating legislators about the real impacts and harm these policies cause.

We know that for many families, the prospect of another tough year is daunting. This guide is built to help parents and allied adults stand up for LGBTQ young people by testifying in hearings about the damage that harmful bills cause.

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Basics of Testimony

First consider collaborating with state LGBTQ organizations.

For some hearings, the focus might be very technical. The hearing also may be about getting as many stories as possible or might be that a swing lawmaker really needs to hear from parents in their district. The local advocacy group will know what is most useful for a given day, and what might be counterproductive.

Sign up for testimony.

Every state has a different sign-up protocol. Google your local state legislature and find out how to give testimony. If you want to submit written testimony, that is an option too.

Basics of Testimony

Hearing Etiquette

- **Minimize reactions to legislators or other testimony.** They will kick you out. If you need to step out of the room for a bit it's ok to do that, but know that in some cases, if you give up your seat, you won't be able to return.
- **Wear business casual:** no jeans, shorts, or short sleeves.
- **Print out your testimony** with enough copies for yourself and each member of the committee.
- If there is a local group leading organizing, **check in with them** to see when it's best to provide testimony. They may have a strategy that includes certain experts or storytellers to go at certain points.

Basics of Testimony

Your Testimony

- **Introduce yourself.** Establish credibility. Why should they listen to you? (e.g. “I am a [mom/doctor/rabbi/small business owner/coach] and my best friend growing up is trans,” or “I have lived in [state] all my life/ten years/I’m a new resident.”)
- If you are a constituent of a committee member, **say so!**
- **Be clear** about what you are asking for up front. (e.g. “I support HB##” or “Please vote no on SB##.”)
- **Careful** about sharing children’s stories, full names, details of their life.
- **Tell your own story;** speak from the heart.
- **Give as many details as possible.** (e.g. “I have met with the principal,” or “I love watching my daughter play field hockey”)
- **Don’t argue with lawmakers or other testifiers.** Practice frustration tolerance and expect to hear demeaning comments. Misunderstanding on purpose is not uncommon in politics.

Basics of Testimony

Your Testimony

- **Stick to time limits.** Be prepared to cut down your testimony (i.e. 3 minutes becomes 2, becomes 30 seconds).
- **Practice ahead of time.** This helps you stick to time limits, catch anything that might be or sound confusing, and just get comfortable before speaking in public.
- **Practice grounding/breathing** for calming anxiety before, during, and after testimony.
- **Bring a couple extra written copies.** Sometimes you can submit that written copy into the record, and if your testimony gets cut down or you aren't able to speak, the full version can still get included.
- **[Watch this recorded court hearing for reference on how to testify.](#)**
- **Hearings can be really long/boring and you might get cut off.** Find practices for managing your frustration, making meaning of the event, and letting go of the stress of the day. We are playing the long game here as advocates.
- Remember that hearings can be **scheduled/postponed/canceled** last minute.

Basics of Testimony

Follow-up Questions

- Remember that lawmakers **won't always ask**.
- Sometimes, it can get really adversarial. **Be prepared to stay calm**.
- Even friendly questions can feel intrusive. Only respond to **what you feel comfortable**.
- "I don't know" is an okay answer. **Stick to what you know**.
- Pivot back to your **one key point**. This can help you feel in control.

Tips & Aftercare

Testimony Tips

- Bring snacks and water – hearings can take several hours.
- Bring quiet activities for younger folks, like coloring books.
- Bring tissues and hand sanitizer.
- Plan for the hearing to go longer than you think.
- Take breaks; it's okay to not be in the hearing room the entire time.
- **It is okay to leave.** If your testimony has been planned ahead with the state partner coordinating the effort, let them know, and also let them know ahead of time if you feel like it is possible you may not be able to stay.
- It can be really hard for parents to come to testify if they have to bring kids with them or find childcare. If there is a core group of parents who show up for hearings, **collaborate amongst yourselves** that some folks stay home and take care of the kids while others are at the statehouse. This is also a very important way of supporting the work!

Tips & Aftercare

After Care

- If you can, give yourself some time to **decompress**. Testifying is important, but it can be very difficult.
- **Spend time with affirming people**. Talk about what you've gone through.
- **Practice self-care**. Do the things that bring you peace and joy.
- **Know that you made an impact**. You can feel good that you did everything you could to make a difference.

For Young People Considering Testimony

Remember, this may not always be necessary. Your main priority is to protect them from trauma. Get consent, every time. **Don't assume young people want to testify.**

Strategies: Pivoting & How to Say “I Don’t Know”

The Basics

- **Listen:** Be alert and listen carefully to your co-speakers and audience.
- **It’s okay to not know:** You do not have to answer anything. It’s also okay to not know something.
- **Repetition:** Come back to your key messages. Repetition increases retention, but be sure to keep your testimony from getting redundant, because lawmakers may cut you off.

Delivery

- **Remember, you may be on camera!** Stay engaged and aware of your facial expressions. Don’t fidget or swing/rock in your chair. Make sure hand gestures stay below the neck.
- **Speak slowly**, enunciate, and put a fine point on each answer.
- **Do not interrupt.** Try to limit audible noises as you’re listening (e.g. “uh huh” or “yeah.”)
- **Most importantly:** Be yourself, be positive, and let your personality shine through!

Strategies: Pivoting & How to Say “I Don’t Know”

Answering Questions

Keep your responses succinct, high-level and message-driven.

Avoid the urge to over-explain.

TIP: Response = Answer + Message

(Answer the question at hand simply, then broaden to core messaging.)

Scenarios

- If you make a mistake or something comes out wrong, stop and restate your answer.
- Multiple questions: Pick the easiest or the one that leads to a key message.
- If they misconstrue your message: “I wouldn’t put it quite that way.”
- If they distort facts: Correct them (in a non-hostile or dismissive way).
(e.g. “actually the research shows the opposite” then share a statistic.)
Similarly, don’t share facts you’re not 100% sure on.
- Far-fetched or hypothetical questions: “I don’t have insight into that...”
- Avoid guessing if you don’t know the answer. Instead, block and bridge.

Strategies: Pivoting & How to Say “I Don’t Know”

Block and Bridge

There may come a time when you’re asked a question you really don’t want to answer. Remember, your job is to deliver the right information, not to answer every question you’re asked.

- Be direct if you can’t answer something
- “I’m not the expert on X, but what I can tell you is...”
- “I can’t speak to that, but it might be helpful if I tell you about...”
- Or, block the question + use a bridging technique to refocus the conversation back to our talking points/key messages
- “What’s important to remember is...”
- “That’s a great question; the way we like to think about it is...”
- “Well, we think the bigger issue is...”

Your goal is to get all of your key messages across. If a tough question allows you to circle back to one of your key points, use that to draw the audience back to the point we want to make. Lastly, if you’re unsure of something or don’t have the exact answer on hand, never speculate or make something up. **It is ok to say you don’t know something.**

Research to Reference

Quick Links

- [Facts About LGBTQ Youth Suicide](#)
- [The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#)
- [New Poll Emphasizes Negative Impacts of Anti-LGBTQ Policies on LGBTQ Youth](#)

Polling on Negative Impacts of Anti-LGBTQ Bills

- **71% of LGBTQ youth** – including 86% of trans and nonbinary youth – say state laws restricting the rights of LGBTQ young people have negatively impacted their mental health.
- **75% of LGBTQ youth** – including 82% of transgender and nonbinary youth – say that threats of violence against LGBTQ spaces, such as community centers, pride events, drag shows, or hospitals/clinics that serve transgender people, often give them stress or anxiety.

Research to Reference

On Suicide Risk

- Suicide is the **second leading cause of death** among young people **aged 10 to 24** – and LGBTQ young people are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers.
- The Trevor Project estimates that more than **1.8 million** LGBTQ youth (**13-24**) seriously consider suicide each year in the U.S. – and at least one attempts suicide **every 45 seconds**.
- The Trevor Project's [**2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health**](#) found that **45%** of LGBTQ youth, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth, seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.
- LGBTQ youth who experienced anti-LGBTQ victimization – including being physically threatened or harmed, discriminated against, or subjected to conversion therapy – reported **more than twice the rate** of attempting suicide in the past year compared to those who did not have any of these anti-LGBTQ experiences.
- LGBTQ youth who lived in an accepting community, had access to LGBTQ-affirming schools, and/or felt high social support from family and friends reported **significantly lower rates** of attempting suicide in the past year.

Resources

- [Navigating Personal Safety While Taking Action As An LGBTQ Young Person](#)
- [Coping with Intense Emotions Around the 2020 Presidential Election](#)



LGBTQ young people in search of support can contact The Trevor Project 24/7 through our **TrevorLifeline** at **1-866-488-7386**, via chat at **[TheTrevorProject.org/Help](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/help)**, or by texting **START** to **678-678**.



The Trevor Project is the leading suicide prevention organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people.

We provide 24/7 crisis services for LGBTQ young people via a phone lifeline, text, and chat. We also operate innovative research, advocacy, public training, and peer support programs.



Crisis Services



Advocacy



Peer Support



Education and
Public Awareness



Research