

Written Statement of
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To the
Committee on Oversight and Reform
United States House of Representatives
The Rise of Anti-LGBTQI+ Extremism and Violence in the United States
December 14, 2022

Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kelley Robinson, and I am the President of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the nation's largest civil rights organization working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people. By inspiring and engaging all people, the Human Rights Campaign strives to end discrimination against LGBTQ+ people and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. On behalf of our more than three million members and supporters, I am honored to submit testimony for this important hearing and to demand united action to end the rising tide of hate and violence targeting our community.

Just a few short weeks ago, a shooter entered Club Q, an LGBTQ+ night club in Colorado Springs, and opened fire. Five people were killed; dozens of others were injured. We were already coming together as a community to commemorate Transgender Day of Remembrance, where we remember trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people lost to fatal violence; Club Q was preparing to honor it as well.

Compounding these tragedies is the fact that these horrific losses represent only some of the violence that has shattered LGBTQ+ lives, families, and communities in the past few years. Anti-LGBTQ+ hate is on the rise, fueled by political extremism and rhetoric that is specifically and deliberately devised to make our community less safe, less equal, and less free. Adding nearly unfettered access to guns, this toxic combination has horrific consequences, especially for transgender and BIPOC LGBTQ+ people.

Violence has become a lived reality for so many in our community.

I remember coming of age in dance clubs just like Club Q. My Club Q was SoCo in Columbia, MO. It was the space I went to feel fully accepted and free just as I was as a young queer person in central Missouri. Now, I am married. My wife works in gun violence prevention, and we have

a one-year-old son. Because of the increase in violence against our community there is nowhere that we feel safe—not at the grocery store, not in the movie theaters, not in church, not in the bars and dance clubs we used to go to find safety, community, and joy. We are working every day to make sure that our child gets to grow up and gets feel safety and celebrated in every area of his life.

Our community deserves safe spaces, deserves joy, deserves to live and thrive. We must unite as a nation now and take urgent action to protect the LGBTQ+ community from further violence and discrimination.

LGBTQ+ people have faced a long history of violence and discrimination in the U.S.

LGBTQ+ communities in the United States have always been fighting for their safety, and for their rights to live freely and openly. The roots of Pride grew from the persistent intimidation and violence facing our communities coupled with our collective courage to push back. Compton's Cafeteria. The Black Cat. Stonewall Inn. Raids here and in many other queer spaces culminated in protests that sparked a movement for our liberation. But just as the work of that movement continues to this day, sadly so do the horrific threats of violence and discrimination we face.

Research documents that LGBTQ+ people continue to face rampant violence across the country.

LGBTQ+ people live in every state and county and reflect the breadth of diversity and lived experiences of the communities in which we live. We face many of the same threats of harm facing other Americans—but as LGBTQ+ people who uniquely experience harassment and discrimination based upon our sexual orientation and gender identity, we are regularly forced to confront additional risks to our safety. The best available data show that these trends continue. Even in 2021, one in five of all hate crimes reported to the FBI were motivated by anti-LGBTQ+ bias, per statistics released earlier this week.¹ Likewise, data collected through the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) indicate that, between 2017 and 2020, the rate of violent victimization of lesbian and gay people was more than two times the rate for straight people.²

And unfortunately, these violent threats disproportionately impact transgender people. Transgender and bisexual people responding to the NCVS reported experiencing violence at even higher rates than their lesbian and gay counterparts.³ Throughout the last ten years, HRC has engaged in its own tracking of violence against transgender and gender non-conforming

¹ *Hate Crime in the United States Incident Analysis: 2021*, FBI CRIME DATA EXPLORER, <https://crime-data-explorer.fr.cloud.gov/pages/explorer/crime/hate-crime> (last visited Dec. 12, 2022) (indicating 16% of incidents were motivated by sexual orientation bias and 4% by gender identity bias); see also *Hate Crime Statistics*, JUSTICE.GOV, <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics> (last visited Dec. 12, 2022) (providing 2020 data).

² JENNIFER L. TRUMAN & RACHEL E. MORGAN, DEP'T OF JUSTICE, OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS, VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION BY SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY, 2017–2020 at 1 (2022), <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/vvsogi1720.pdf>; see also Andrew R. Flores et al., *Gender Identity Disparities in Criminal Victimization: National Crime Victimization Survey, 2017–2018*, 111 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 726 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.306099>; Andrew R. Flores et al., *Victimization Rates and Traits of Sexual and Gender Minorities in the United States: Results from the National Crime Victimization Survey, 2017*, 6 SCIENCE ADVANCES eaba6910 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aba6910>.

³ TRUMAN & MORGAN, *supra* note 2.

people: We have recorded over 300 violent deaths in that time.⁴ So far this year, we have reported on the murders of 35 people—many of them Black transgender women like Diamond Jackson-McDonald, who was shot and killed in Philadelphia on Thanksgiving Day.⁵ In fact, among the community members lost this year per our tracking, 85% were people of color and 85% were transgender women.⁶

Evidence of persistent discrimination against LGBTQ+ people exists across every area of public life.

Pervasive discrimination against LGBTQ+ communities takes many forms, particularly for those holding multiple marginalized identities experiencing the brunt of racism, colorism, misogyny, ableism, and other forms of hate. In addition to threats to physical safety, research has long documented that LGBTQ+ people in the United States are at risk of being denied basic services, experiencing targeted harassment, and being treated unfavorably, simply for being who they are.⁷ Studies show that such discrimination occurs across the country to this day, impacting LGBTQ+ people at our places of work; at school;⁸ when seeking housing and emergency shelter;⁹ when applying for credit;¹⁰ while seeking health care;¹¹ when frequenting public places and spaces;¹² and many other key areas. These attacks follow the same playbook as historical and current attacks on black and brown people.

⁴ HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUND., AN EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE 2022 (2022), <https://reports.hrc.org/an-epidemic-of-violence-2022>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *See, e.g.*, NPR, ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUND. & HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCH. OF PUB. HEALTH, DISCRIMINATION IN AMERICA: EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF LGBTQ AMERICANS (2017), <https://legacy.npr.org/documents/2017/nov/npr-discrimination-lgbtq-final.pdf>; SANDY E. JAMES ET AL., NAT'L CTR. FOR TRANSGENDER EQUALITY, THE REPORT OF THE 2015 U.S. TRANSGENDER SURVEY (2016), <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf>.

⁸ *See generally* JOSEPH G. KOSCIW ET AL., GLSEN, THE 2021 NATIONAL SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY (2022), <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Full-Report.pdf> (K–12); KATHRYN K. O'NEILL ET AL., WILLIAMS INST., EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQ PEOPLE IN FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND GRADUATE PROGRAMS (2022), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBTQ-College-Grad-School-May-2022.pdf> (higher education).

⁹ *See generally* ADAM P. ROMERO ET AL., WILLIAMS INST., LGBT PEOPLE AND HOUSING AFFORDABILITY, DISCRIMINATION, AND HOMELESSNESS (2020), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Housing-Apr-2020.pdf>.

¹⁰ *See generally* Hua Sun & Lei Gao, *Lending Practices to Same-Sex Borrowers*, 1126 PNAS 9293 (2019), <https://www.pnas.org/doi/pdf/10.1073/pnas.1903592116>; J. Shaha Dillbary & Griffin Edwards, *An Empirical Analysis of Sexual Orientation Discrimination*, 86 U. CHI. L. REV. 1 (2019), <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6115&context=uclrev>.

¹¹ *See generally* Shabab Ahmed Mirza & Caitlin Rooney, *Discrimination Prevents LGBTQ People From Accessing Health Care*, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS (Jan. 18, 2018), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/discrimination-prevents-lgbtq-people-accessing-health-care/>; *see also* LAMBDA LEGAL, WHEN HEALTH CARE ISN'T CARING: LAMBDA LEGAL'S SURVEY ON DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBT PEOPLE AND PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV (2010), https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/whic-report_when-health-care-isnt-caring.pdf.

¹² *See generally* CHRISTY MALLORY & BRAD SEARS, WILLIAMS INST., EVIDENCE OF DISCRIMINATION IN PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY: AN ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS FILED WITH STATE ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES, 2008-2014 (2016), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Public-Accomm-Discrimination-Feb-2016.pdf>.

According to a recent Williams Institute study, over 45% of LGBT employees reported experiencing unfair treatment at work at some point in their lives because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.¹³ And despite much needed progress on issues related to LGBTQ+ equality in recent years, these trends continue. Even in the year after the Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, which affirmed that existing federal employment discrimination law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, almost 9% of LGBT workers surveyed reported being fired or not hired due to their LGBT status.¹⁴ There is no context or industry free from the reach of anti-LGBTQ+ hate: a separate Williams Institute study found that over 28% of LGBT employees working for a state or local government employer experienced discrimination or harassment motivated by their LGBT status.¹⁵

Ongoing violence and discrimination perpetuate negative health and social outcomes for LGBTQ+ people.

All acts of hatred committed against LGBTQ+ people have devastating consequences, particularly when coupled with the various costs of inequality facing many LGBTQ+ subpopulations. Often, these experiences leave community members more likely to live in poverty, to experience housing instability and homelessness, and to lack access to opportunities that would allow them and their families to thrive.¹⁶ Exposure to psychological stressors, like acts of violence and discrimination, places a significant burden on the physical and mental well-being of LGBTQ+ people.¹⁷ As a result, LGBTQ+ youth and adults alike report being more likely to experience health challenges, including an elevated prevalence of substance use and suicidal thoughts and attempts.¹⁸ While LGBTQ+ people have the same general risk factors as our non-LGBTQ+ counterparts with respect to suicide, research shows we have additional risk

¹³ BRAD SEARS ET AL., WILLIAMS INST., LGBT PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT 5 (2021), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-Discrimination-Sep-2021.pdf>.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 13.

¹⁵ CHRISTY MALLORY ET AL., WILLIAMS INST., WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT AGAINST LGBT STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES 4 (2021), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Public-Sector-Discrimination-Nov-2021.pdf>.

¹⁶ *See generally* ILAN H. MEYER ET AL., WILLIAMS INST., LGBTQ PEOPLE IN THE US: SELECT FINDINGS FROM THE GENERATIONS AND TRANSPop STUDIES (2021), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Generations-TransPop-Toplines-Jun-2021.pdf>.

¹⁷ INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE, THE HEALTH OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE: BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING 20–21 (2011), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64806>.

¹⁸ *See generally* HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN, MENTAL HEALTH AND THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY (2017), https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/LGBTQ_MentalHealth_OnePager.pdf, *citing* GRACE MEDLEY ET AL., SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND ESTIMATES OF ADULT SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL HEALTH: RESULTS FROM THE 2015 NATIONAL SURVEY ON DRUG USE AND HEALTH, NATIONAL SURVEY ON DRUG USE AND HEALTH (2016), [https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-SexualOrientation-2015/NSDUH-SexualOrientation-2015.htm](https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-SexualOrientation-2015/NSDUH-SexualOrientation-2015/NSDUH-SexualOrientation-2015.htm).

factors tied to our experiences as LGBTQ+ people—such as transgender people experiencing distress after being denied legal access to medically necessary gender-affirming care.¹⁹

Extremist lawmakers have advanced a record number of anti-LGBTQ+ policies alongside false narratives.

Violence and discrimination against LGBTQ+ communities is the tragic result of a society that devalues our lives, particularly the lives of Black and Brown transgender and gender non-conforming people, who face significantly higher rates of harassment, bias, and physical violence. An onslaught of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation has been justified with discriminatory, harmful disinformation and rhetoric that deliberately dehumanizes LGBTQ+ people.

Anti-LGBTQ+ legislators in the states passed a record number of discriminatory bills this past session, accelerating the spread of hatred we are seeing occur in every corner of the country.

State lawmakers have advanced an onslaught of bills aiming to restrict the areas of public life where LGBTQ+ people can freely and openly participate as our true selves. Nationwide in 2022, more than 25 anti-LGBTQ+ bills were enacted—including 17 laws that have a disproportionate or targeted impact on transgender people—across 13 states.²⁰ Overall, a total of 344 anti-LGBTQ+ bills were introduced across 23 states.²¹ These bills include discriminatory bans on transgender youth playing sports with their classmates or using school bathrooms in accordance with their gender identity. They include bans on doctors providing safe, age-appropriate, best-practice, and medically necessary gender-affirming care. They include bans on the books our children can read, profound consequences if a child comes out to a teacher before they have come out to a parent, and “Don’t Say Gay or Trans” style curriculum laws prohibiting even the acknowledgement that LGBTQ+ people exist. They also include bills that give government contractors a right to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people and same-sex families.

Insidiously, these bills often target the youngest among us, with deep impacts upon children and their families as well as trained professionals, like doctors and teachers, who care for them. Even if these bills don’t pass into law, there are deep harms inflicted by the consideration of legislation banning transgender, non-binary, and other gender non-conforming youth from accessing medical care, playing school sports, or using public restrooms. It sends a message. A horrifying, wrong message that tells us that even from an early age, transgender people are different, dangerous, and unwelcome. These bills put these youth in harm’s way and create a toxic environment where they and all LGBTQ+ youth will be unable to fully achieve their highest potential in the classroom and beyond.²²

¹⁹ JODY L. HERMAN & KATHRYN K. O’NEILL, WILLIAMS INST., SUICIDE RISK AND PREVENTION FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS 2 (2021), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Suicide-Summary-Sep-2021.pdf>.

²⁰ See *Anti-LGBTQ+ Bills in 2022*, HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/state-maps/anti-lgbtq-bills-in-2021> (last visited Dec. 12, 2022).

²¹ See *id.*

²² See *LGBTQI+ Youth*, STOPBULLYING.GOV (Sept. 10, 2021), https://www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/lgbtq?utm_source=youth.gov&utm_medium=Youth-

These legislative agendas are predicated on outright disinformation about LGBTQ+ people.

Unrelenting efforts by anti-LGBTQ+ lawmakers help cement false narratives about our communities in the public consciousness, regardless of whether the underlying bills are enacted. Their narratives today echo falsehoods that have been weaponized many times in the past, against LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ people alike, to enact discriminatory laws and policies and encourage extremist rhetoric and violence.

These legislators falsely claim that existing practices are highly experimental, unregulated, and include a range of procedures that we know are not performed on children. In reality, health care professionals have worked for decades to rigorously develop standards of care that emphasize effective, age-appropriate treatment in this space, just like with all other medical procedures. But as we have learned over the past few months, these lies proliferate and can have devastating, real world consequences. This is true not only for LGBTQ+ people and our families, but also medical professionals and even non-LGBTQ+ patients being denied safe access to care by the violence brought on by this rhetoric.

Likewise, many of these lawmakers characterize their bills as being necessary to protect children, espousing malicious and false rhetoric about “grooming” or LGBTQ+ “predators” and implicitly encouraging that action be taken against the perceived “threat” of LGBTQ+ people. In Florida, the governor’s press secretary characterized the state’s “Don’t Say Gay or Trans” bill as an “Anti-Grooming” bill, claiming that anyone against it is “probably” a groomer or at the very least would not “denounce the grooming of 4-8 year old children.”²³ And in turn, the average number of tweets per day using slurs such as “groomer” and “pedophile” in relation to LGBTQ+ people surged by 406% in the month following the passage of that bill.²⁴

Actors across every branch of government are joining state legislators in these attacks.

While many of these attacks have come from the halls of statehouses, various states’ governors and administrative agencies have issued executive orders, regulations, and other policies premised on anti-LGBTQ+ falsehoods. These efforts signal, at best, a total indifference to the well-being of LGBTQ+ people, particularly transgender youth. In fact, executive and administrative actions that punish doctors and parents for supporting a transgender young person who needs age-appropriate, best-practice medical care puts lives, livelihoods, and America’s

[Topic&utm_campaign=LGBT-Youth](#), citing Michelle M. Johns et al., *Trends in Violence Victimization and Suicide Risk by Sexual Identity Among High School Students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2015–2019*, 69 MORBIDITY & MORTALITY WKLY. REP. 19 (2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/2019/su6901-H.pdf>.

²³ @ChristinaPushaw, TWITTER (Mar. 4, 2022, 6:33 PM), <https://twitter.com/christinapushaw/status/1499890719691051008>.

²⁴ CTR. FOR COUNTERING DIGITAL HATE & HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN, SOCIAL MEDIA’S ROLE IN AMPLIFYING DANGEROUS LIES ABOUT LGBTQ+ PEOPLE 13 (2022), <https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/CCDH-HRC-Digital-Hate-Report-2022-single-pages.pdf>.

most essential freedoms on the line. These politicians ignore or distort the decades of research on gender-affirming care, and reject the stories of the experts and those most impacted.²⁵

Like all Americans, LGBTQ+ people were significantly impacted by the Supreme Court's decision rolling back our rights to abortion access through their decision in *Dobbs*.²⁶ The recent and historic passage of the Respect for Marriage Act was a direct response to that decision and provides much needed safeguards for countless families who have relied on the guarantees of marriage equality following the Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell*. However, there is a direct line between the rhetoric underlying *Dobbs* and what these lawmakers are claiming about LGBTQ+ communities—meaning state legislatures will likely seize on *Dobbs* to introduce more bills undermining equality for LGBTQ+ people. The destabilizing effect that *Dobbs* has had across the country will continue to impact LGBTQ+ rights as it emboldens states to take further discriminatory action.

LGBTQ+ people suffer even when campaigns of hate and stigma fail to materialize into enacted legislation.

A longstanding body of research documents that legislative efforts to ban or otherwise exclude and marginalize LGBTQ+ people from aspects of public life have negative impacts on our mental health.²⁷ Conversely, enacting pro-LGBTQ+ policies can help lead to improved mental health among members of our community.²⁸ These efforts by government actors can have far reaching impacts: one study showed that states permitting same-sex marriage showed a reduction in proportions of high school students attempting suicide.²⁹

LGBTQ+ people live from coast to coast, with the Williams Institute's estimates on same-sex couples drawn from Census Bureau data showing we live in virtually every county of every state in the country.³⁰ According to a report released last year by the Human Rights Campaign

²⁵ Press Release, Human Rights Campaign, Human Rights Campaign Condemns Florida Board of Medicine for Considering Gov. DeSantis' Politically-Motivated Proposal to Ban Affirming Care for Transgender Youth (Aug. 04, 2022), <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/human-rights-campaign-condemns-florida-board-of-medicine-for-considering-gov-desantis-politically-motivated-proposal-to-ban-affirming-care-for-transgender-youth>.

²⁶ See, e.g., CATHREN COHEN ET AL., UCLA CTR. ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, LAW, & POLICY, THE IMPLICATIONS OF DOBBS ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE ACCESS FOR LGBTQ PEOPLE WHO CAN GET PREGNANT (2022), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBTQ-Repro-Access-Oct-2022.pdf>.

²⁷ See, e.g., Ellen D.B. Riggle et al., *Psychological Distress, Well-Being, and Legal Recognition in Same-Sex Couple Relationships*, 24 J. FAMILY PSYCHOLOGY 82 (2010), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20175612/>; Mark L. Hatzenbuehler et al., *State-Level Policies and Psychiatric Morbidity in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations*, 99 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 2275 (2009), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19833997/>; Sharon Scales Rostosky & Ellen D.B. Riggle, *Marriage Amendments and Psychological Distress in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) Adults*, 56 J. OF COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY 56 (2009), <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/cou-56-1-56.pdf>.

²⁸ See generally ANDREW R. FLORES ET AL., WILLIAMS INST., THE IMPACT OF *OBERGEFELL V. HODGES* ON THE WELL-BEING OF LGBT ADULTS (2020), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Happiness-After-Obergefell-Jun-2020.pdf>.

²⁹ Julia Raifman et al., *Difference-in-Differences Analysis of the Association Between State Same-Sex Marriage Policies and Adolescent Suicide Attempts*, 171 JAMA PEDIATRICS 350 (2017), <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2604258>.

³⁰ *Population Density of Same-sex Couples: United States*, WILLIAMS INST. (Jan. 2019), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=SS&showCounties=true#density>; cf. CHRISTY

Foundation, at least 20 million adults in the U.S. self-identify as LGBTQ.³¹ Our own research indicates that this percentage will continue to grow over time,³² as younger populations are more likely to identify as LGBTQ+.³³ In turn, debates about LGBTQ+ rights—and increasingly, efforts to stymie those rights through malicious false narratives—are likely to have a negative impact on our communities regardless if they occur at the local, state, or federal level.

Anti-LGBTQ+ lawmakers’ efforts are directly increasing the risk of violence facing our communities today.

LGBTQ+ people, as well as our families and allies, are facing serious threats to our safety across the country. The recent exponential increase of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and false narratives espoused by lawmakers is fueling growing attacks on our communities from statehouses to school boards, from pulpits to Pride events, from sidewalks to street corners. Many of our spaces no longer feel safe, and instead serve as reminders that easy access to guns combined with this violent rhetoric can have toxic and often fatal results no matter where we might go.

We are living in a culture of extremism and our communities are afraid.

On the eve of Transgender Day of Remembrance, at Club Q in Colorado Springs, we lost five members of our community and allies to gun violence. Many more were injured. The devastating impact that the epidemic of gun violence has on LGBTQ+ communities is palpable for many of us right now—as it was in the aftermath of the horrifying events at Pulse in Orlando only six years ago. But unfortunately, being subjected to gun violence has long been a lived reality for many LGBTQ+ people in the United States. In fact, two-thirds of the more than 300 fatalities we have tracked over the last ten years involved guns.³⁴

It is easy for us to imagine these trends continuing as extremist lawmakers prepare to maintain their campaigns of anti-LGBTQ+ hate and disinformation through upcoming legislative sessions. Alongside those lawmakers, right-wing religious leaders, print and online publications, and national media celebrities, as well as deep and dark websites, have been amplifying dangerous anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric. Many of these groups’ efforts center that alarming and malicious narrative that LGBTQ+ people are “dangerous” “groomers” that engage in “child abuse” and “indoctrination.” They appear eager to continue this campaign.

MALLORY & BRAD SEARS, WILLIAMS INST., THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY FIVE YEARS AFTER *OBERGEFELL V. HODGES* (2020), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Economic-Impact-SS-Marriage-May-2020.pdf> (noting that the number of married same-sex couples in the U.S. has doubled since the Supreme Court’s decision in *Obergefell* in 2015).

³¹ HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUND., WE ARE HERE: UNDERSTANDING THE SIZE OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY (2021), <https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/We-Are-Here-120821.pdf>.

³² SHOSHANA K. GOLDBERG ET AL., HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN & BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIV., EQUALITY ELECTORATE: THE PROJECTED GROWTH OF THE LGBTQ+ VOTING BLOC IN COMING YEARS (2022), <https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/LGBTQ-VEP-Oct-2022.pdf>.

³³ See, e.g., Jeffrey M. Jones, *LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1%*, GALLUP (Feb. 17, 2022), <https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx> (noting that “[r]oughly 21% of Generation Z Americans who have reached adulthood -- those born between 1997 and 2003 -- identify as LGBT.”).

³⁴ HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUND., *supra* note 4.

These campaigns of hate are everywhere, and their impact is very real.

Yesterday, we released a report identifying 24 different hospitals and providers across 22 states who were directly attacked online following harassing, inflammatory and misleading posts by these types of campaigns.³⁵ Despite their rhetoric, these groups ultimately chose to target providers who had done nothing other than offer best-practice, evidence-based, age-appropriate medical care to transgender, non-binary, and questioning youth. Just last week, California State Senator Scott Wiener—himself a gay, Jewish man—was the target of a bomb threat following his work for transgender youth and their families.³⁶ Included in the threatening email he received were two words: “pedophile” and “groomer.”³⁷

These stories echo threats being made in every corner of the United States against LGBTQ+ people, our spaces, and our allies. A school in Orange County, California with an LGBTQ-inclusive teacher.³⁸ An LGBTQ+ nightclub in Atlanta.³⁹ A seafood restaurant in South Carolina hosting a drag brunch.⁴⁰ These and many other establishments have all received their own bomb threats this year. And as the charging documents for a man recently accused of threatening to kill a Boston doctor for providing gender-affirming care note, these threats are being increasingly spurred by “inaccurate information spread online” about LGBTQ+ people.⁴¹

And these stories do not stop. Vandals firebombed a donut shop in Tulsa after it hosted an art installation run by drag queens.⁴² An LGBTQ+ bar in New York City was attacked four times in one month.⁴³ Small children and their families were terrorized at a drag queen reading event at a Bay Area library by members of the Proud Boys.⁴⁴ A Texas pastor uploaded a hate-filled sermon

³⁵ HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUND., ONLINE HARASSMENT AND OFFLINE VIOLENCE (2022).

³⁶ Press Release, Senator Scott Wiener, Senator Wiener’s Historic Bill to Provide Refuge for Trans Kids and Their Families Signed Into Law (Sept. 30, 2022), <https://sd11.senate.ca.gov/news/20220930-senator-wiener%E2%80%99s-historic-bill-provide-refuge-trans-kids-and-their-families-signed-law>.

³⁷ *Gay, Jewish California Lawmaker Targeted with Bomb Threat for Second Time*, CBS NEWS (Dec. 7, 2022), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/scott-weiner-gay-jewish-california-lawmaker-bomb-threat-second-time/>.

³⁸ Collin Breaux, *Sheriff’s Department Investigates Anti-LGBTQ Bomb Threats Made Against Capo Unified School District*, CAPISTRANO DISPATCH (Dec. 7, 2022) <https://www.thecapistranodispatch.com/sheriffs-department-investigates-anti-lgbtq-bomb-threats-made-against-capo-unified-school-district/>.

³⁹ Rob DiRienzo & FOX 5 Atlanta Digital Team, *Atlanta Police Arrest Person With Making Threats to LGBTQ+ Friendly Nightclub*, FOX 5 ATLANTA (Nov. 27, 2022), <https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/atlanta-police-charge-person-with-making-threats-to-lgbtq-friendly-nightclub>.

⁴⁰ Andrew James, *Police Respond To 'Hoax Bomb Threat' As Grand Strand Eatery Hosted Drag Brunch Event*, ABC 15 NEWS (Dec. 4, 2022), <https://wpde.com/news/local/police-respond-to-hoax-bomb-threat-as-grand-strand-eatery-hosted-drag-brunch-event>.

⁴¹ Press Release, Dep’t of Justice, Texas Man Charged with Threatening Doctor Affiliated with the National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center (Dec. 2, 2022), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ma/pr/texas-man-charged-threatening-doctor-affiliated-national-lgbtqia-health-education-center>.

⁴² María Luisa Paúl, *Donut Hole Shop in Tulsa Hit by Molotov Cocktail After Drag Event*, WASH. POST (Nov. 4, 2022), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/11/04/donut-hole-molotov-cocktail-drag/>.

⁴³ Zachary Schermele, *Brick Thrown at an NYC Gay Bar is Being Investigated as a Hate Crime*, NBC NEWS (Nov. 21, 2022), <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/brick-thrown-nyc-gay-bar-investigated-hate-crime-rcna58201>.

⁴⁴ Vandana Ravikumar, *Proud Boys Storm Reading Event Hosted by Drag Queen at California Library, Deputies Say*, SACRAMENTO BEE (June 13, 2022), <https://www.sacbee.com/news/nation-world/national/article262475427.html>.

encouraging that gay people be “lined up against the wall and shot in the back of the head.”⁴⁵ These threats and rhetoric are culminating into a dangerous, terrifying climate for LGBTQ+ people nationwide. Indeed, in its most recent six-month National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin, the Department of Homeland Security included the LGBTQ+ community among its list of targets for potential violence—for the first time in the history of these notices.⁴⁶

We must take action to prevent future violence and harm against LGBTQ+ communities.

We cannot look away from the reality of what our communities are experiencing. By taking a multi-pronged approach, we can prevent this crisis of extremism from perpetuating further violence against LGBTQ+ people. But we must do this now, and do this together. In partnership, we can ensure everyone across the United States can live their lives knowing that they are respected for who they are and are free from the influence of bigotry.

Congress must take concrete, immediate steps to address ongoing discrimination and violence against LGBTQ+ people. For example, full passage of the Equality Act would provide consistent and explicit federal non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people across key areas of life where we know they regularly encounter unfair treatment. Likewise, Congress could address persistent gun violence—and its disproportionate impact on marginalized communities—by passing common-sense gun safety solutions.

To successfully combat this epidemic of violence, we must all work to repudiate anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and falsehoods in the strongest possible terms. Lawmakers, social media companies, and other stakeholders in the fight against disinformation and online hate need to recognize the severity and immediacy of this specific threat against LGBTQ+ people, and work together to establish guidelines and practices that can successfully protect our communities from harm.

In June, thirty-one Patriot Front White Supremacists were arrested just minutes from initiating a coordinated riot targeting the Coeur d’Alene, Idaho Pride.⁴⁷ A partnership between the Department of Justice, FBI, and local law enforcement prevented these extremists from translating their violent rhetoric into violent action. We know we can succeed against these campaigns when we work to do so together. But until we as a country unite to address and dismantle the barriers and hate faced by LGBTQ+ people, the most marginalized in our communities are likely to continue paying the greatest price.

⁴⁵ @AlwaysBaptist, *Why We Won’t Shut Up*, NEWTUBE (June 8, 2022), <https://newtube.app/AlwaysBaptist/swXlmo3?fbclid=IwAR2spXne9aOwTfaB8EecRdy-5ND1vXkb5cBjkJrI14ofCWCbEPk9uPznQA>.

⁴⁶ DEP’T OF HOMELAND SECURITY, NATIONAL TERRORISM ADVISORY SYSTEM BULLETIN 1 (Nov. 30, 2022), https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/ntas/alerts/22_1130_S1_NTAS-Bulletin-508.pdf.

⁴⁷ Nicole Hemmer, *Opinion: Arrests at Idaho Pride Event Could Be A Harbinger of Things to Come*, CNN (June 15, 2022), <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/15/opinions/idaho-patriot-front-pride-arrests-hemmer/index.html>.