

What LGBTQ+ Community Members Need from You Right Now

It is a scary and uncertain time. Many in the LGBTQ+ community are looking to their institutions and community leaders to take measures to protect them. The freedoms of LGBTQ+ people, of Jews, and of so many other Americans are in jeopardy. When the rights of any group of people are threatened, the safety of Jews and all minorities are also imperiled. The deluge of attacks and misinformation will continue and may get worse. But we also know this: **Without a doubt, when our Jewish communities take action and stand up for LGBTQ+ rights, it makes a difference.**

As Jewish leaders and institutions navigate this moment, we know that many have questions, and we offer these answers to you and your communities.

How can Jewish community organizations respond to hostile legislation for LGBTQ+ youth?

It is important to remember that Jewish organizations, such as synagogues, Hebrew schools, camps, and day schools, are private religious institutions. For better or for worse, there are limits to the extent that the government can regulate your programs and policies. Your Jewish organization might be one of the few places where LGBTQ+ people — especially youth — can find affirmation. Many anti-LGBTQ+ laws that apply to public schools and other public spaces do not apply to our Jewish spaces. Therefore, Jewish organizations (as well as other religious organizations) have a unique role to play in supporting their LGBTQ+ community members when government-funded institutions can't.

Anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and sentiment may open the door for people to claim that they have a right to express homophobia or transphobia in your Jewish community, or to push back against inclusive programming. The key to combating this pushback is to avoid overcorrecting in the name of adhering to these policies. By developing a thorough understanding of the relevant state laws in order to confidently and accurately combat pushback, leaders can ensure their Jewish institutions continue to be supportive and safe spaces for LGBTQ+ people and trans youth in particular.

What attacks on LGBTQ+ communities are you seeing or anticipating, and how are you planning to respond?

We will continue to face the legislative onslaught, primarily on trans rights, that we have been seeing over the last few years. The main difference is that now the executive branch will promote the same attacks on trans freedoms that we have been up against at the state level. Specifically, we anticipate **continued and intensified attacks*** on: gender-affirming healthcare, trans people in sports, books with LGBTQ+ content, identity markers for trans people on government forms, and vital LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination legislation like the Equality Act. We also expect escalated attempts to erode the separation of church and state inside of our public school systems with politicians pushing for chaplain bills and 10 Commandments bills, which would bring untrained clergy and bible passages directly into public schools.

We anticipate that anti-LGBTQ+ politicians will continue to propose extreme measures, not necessarily expecting them to pass immediately (or at all) in order to shift the window of what seems possible over time. We will respond as we have already — in coalition, with Jewish allies, and through relationships and advocacy at both the state and federal level. We will counter the rhetoric that these policies represent the will of the people; They do not. We know that over 60% of Americans, **including over 80% of American Jews**,** support non-discrimination protections for transgender people.

At Keshet, we will continue to work with and support Jewish community institutions to fight back against these awful attacks and policies in the public sphere and to provide havens of belonging in their own communities.

Things are changing so quickly. Could work for LGBTQ+ equality and belonging become illegal?

The extremist agenda of this Administration hinges on public support. It has already provoked strong opposition from advocacy groups, civil rights organizations, and affected communities. Policies that are perceived as too extreme or that infringe upon rights and protections enjoyed by diverse communities will face significant opposition.

It is important to remember that bills and policies that seek to punish institutions committed to LGBTQ+ and trans rights are focused on those that receive public funding, which excludes the majority of religious institutions. We hope that Jewish communal leaders stay committed to this work at a time when it is truly more critical than ever.

*<https://translegislation.com/>

** <https://www.prii.org/research/views-on-lgbtq-rights-in-all-50-states/>

What can we do?

Jewish communal institutions have a real opportunity to support LGBTQ+ members, and specifically LGBTQ+ youth, at a time when attacks on them are increasing. Stay informed. Build your networks. Cultivate belonging of all kinds in your community. Speak up in the face of attacks. [And sign up to get resources and information on actions from Keshet.](#)

How to talk about LGBTQ+ safety and dignity:

If someone says...

“Introducing these ideas will influence students to think that they are gay/trans.”

Respond...

There is no way to “cause” a person to hold one identity or another, and hiding information cannot erase LGBTQ+ people, it can only cause distress. Sharing information and words for experiences is educational and validating for those who need that information most.

Support can also be life-saving. According to the Trevor Project’s survey of LGBTQ+ youth & young adults in 2024***: **39% of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide** in the past year — including **46% of transgender and nonbinary young people**. We also know that LGBTQ+ young people who reported **living in very accepting communities attempted suicide at less than half the rate** of those who reported living in very unaccepting communities.

“Donors or families will leave if we become too LGBTQ+ affirming.”

Most community members who object to a specific policy do not leave. A few may, but there are likely more who will join. No action ever satisfies every stakeholder. We cannot let fear prevent us from living our values and serving the full spectrum of our community.

We take seriously the Jewish value of mutual responsibility — *Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh BaZeh* — and believe that all of us are called upon to protect one another.

***<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024/>

If someone says...

“Transgender people (especially trans women) make our community less safe.”

Respond...

There is no actual record of transgender people using gendered spaces to victimize others. Transgender people are actually more likely to be targets than perpetrators of harassment and violence. It's important to acknowledge that change can be hard, and it's critical to remember that there is a difference between discomfort when something is new and being unsafe.

This work is motivated by the belief that we are all created *B'tzelem Elohim*, in the divine image. We celebrate — and strive to help others see and celebrate — the inherent humanity, worth, and dignity of all people.

“Being LGBTQ+ affirming will make us too political/make us *the* LGBTQ+ organization.”

LGBTQ+ rights are not partisan talking points. The majority of Americans of all political parties support LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination: **64% of Americans favor laws or policies that would protect transgender people from discrimination****** in jobs, housing, and public spaces. Many of our organizations do engage on nonpartisan (501c3 friendly) civic matters when they impact our members. In fact, 85% of American Jews support LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination protections, with majority support across all party lines. As the lives of LGBTQ+ people are used by those in power as political pawns, it is important to remember that *politicized* is not the same as *political*.

****<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/06/28/americans-complex-views-on-gender-identity-and-transgender-issues/>

Conclusion

There is a lot we don't know about what will come next, but we do know this: we will not give up, we will keep doing the work, and we urge you to join us. Keshet will keep working for LGBTQ+ equality and belonging. What we — all of us — say, what we do, matters. And know that you too have a critical role to play.

Reach out to education@keshetonline.org to learn more about what your institution can do to strengthen LGBTQ+ belonging; to cm@keshetonline.org to get involved in advocating for LGBTQ+ rights; to youth@keshetonline.org to learn about programming and resources for LGBTQ+ youth; and to qjoc@keshetonline.org to learn about programming and resources for LGBTQ+ Jews of Color.

Additional Resources

- [Supporting Transgender People](#), Trans Equality
- [Anti Transgender Misconceptions and Facts](#), Keshet
- [Get the Facts on Gender-Affirming Care](#), Human Rights Campaign
- [Get the Facts about Bans on Sports Participation By Transgender & Non-Binary Students](#), Human Rights Campaign
- [Services for Trans Adults and Families of Trans People](#), Keshet