

**To: Interested Parties**

**Fr: The Transgender Freedom Alliance**

**Date: July 24, 2024**

**Re: Talking about Transgender Young People on the Campaign Trail**

---

**The Transgender Freedom Alliance (TFA) helps candidates talk about transgender issues.**

TFA is a donor-driven project collaborating with progressive opinion researchers and key partners in the transgender community to develop effective messaging on transgender issues for electoral campaigns, and provide training and technical assistance to help candidates, elected officials, and other communicators frame these issues and handle anti-transgender attacks.

**This guidance is based on extensive recent research.** This memo provides evidence-backed message recommendations for use in political debates and conversations with general audiences across age, race, and geography. Recommendations are based on extensive qualitative and quantitative research by TFA partners, including Worthy Strategies, Real Language LLC, Sprout Insight, and Impact Research.<sup>1</sup>

**This messaging resonates with conflicted audiences.** Overall, our research finds that there are effective strategies to quell voter trepidation and anxiety on issues around transgender young people. These messages acknowledge the often conflicted position of the electorate and emphasize the proper role of elected officials in decision making. They are designed to help voters get past their initial emotional reactions and provide alternate perspectives that prompt voters to at least question the Right's position, and at best, oppose it.

## Do's

---

### OVERALL FRAMING

**Voters are generally open to changing the subject.** Many voters agree that transgender issues get too much attention in our current political conversations, and a significant share feel that these issues are being exploited for political purposes. Consequently they often welcome political messengers moving on to discuss higher-priority topics.

**Make your priorities clear.** It is helpful at the start of any conversation about transgender issues to clarify how you see these issues relative to your other priorities.

---

<sup>1</sup> Recommendations are based on a poll conducted June 20-27 among likely 2024 voters nationwide (n=1000), with oversamples of Black (n=200) and Latino (n=200) voters. The full sample margin of error is +/- 3.1%; the margin of error for subgroups varies and is higher. 50% of interviews were conducted by text-to-web, and 50% were via an online panel.

## Recommended Message

- **More than ever, Americans are working hard to make ends meet. We need real solutions to the problems we're facing, not politicians stirring up divisions for their own political gain.**
- **So while certain politicians are focused on creating a big panic around transgender kids...**
- **I'm focused on raising incomes and lowering everyday costs for working families.**

## HEALTHCARE

**On the issue of healthcare for transgender young people, focus on who should get to make these decisions – parents, families and doctors – and focus specifically on parents wanting to care for their child.** Regardless of whether voters support young people seeking transition-related medical care, they do agree that politicians should not make these decisions. Our best response is not to litigate whether or who should be allowed to access care, but rather to make this a discussion about who decides. Voters agree that healthcare decisions for a transgender young person should be made by parents and doctors who know best – not politicians.

**Offer a simple statement on this topic, and then move on.** On this topic, voters will generally welcome you offering a short statement of your basic perspective and then moving on to higher-priority topics.

**When pressed, frame Republican bans as bans on healthcare, including mental healthcare.** The mental health and counseling component of transition-related care matters to voters and they view it as imperative. They are hesitant to support restrictions on healthcare because they want transgender young people to have access to this care.

**When pressed specifically on regret for transition care or detransitioning, highlight that these decisions have guardrails and are not immediate.** Messages that talk about how the expert medical standards require screening, doctor's visits and counseling sessions, and that there are opportunities to stop and reverse treatments, are generally reassuring.

## Recommended Messages

- **Healthcare decisions for a young person who is transgender should be made by parents and doctors, who know the situation best – not politicians.**
- **IF PRESSED:**  
**Banning doctors from providing healthcare to transgender young people would have serious unintended consequences – including banning young people from accessing mental health care to help them with what they're going through and help them understand who they are.**

- IF PRESSED ON DETRANSITION/REGRET:

The decision to seek transgender-related medical care is not something that anyone – whether young OR an adult – is able to rush into. The expert medical standards require extensive screening, doctor’s visits and counseling. It would be impossible for a person to decide they want to transition one day and make an irreversible decision the next.

## HEALTHCARE AND REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

**An alternative healthcare message highlights politicians seeking control of people’s lives.**

Voters do not like politicians raising transgender issues for their own political gain, and they also do not like politicians interfering with important family decisions. Voters recognize the parallels with reproductive freedom, and a message that highlights those parallels stakes out a principled argument that resonates with voters.

### Recommended Message

- **We all deserve the freedom to make decisions about our lives, futures, and families.**
- **But certain politicians are taking away our freedoms. They’re banning abortion, and banning parents from making healthcare decisions about their own children.**
- **The politicians behind these attacks don’t support freedom – their agenda is control.**

## FORCED OUTING

**When speaking to the issue of requiring schools and teachers to report kids for being gay or transgender to their parents (known as “forced outing”), invoke the shared value of keeping kids safe and show empathy for the emotional burden this places on teachers.** Emphasize that not all kids are safe at home, and we should not force teachers to knowingly put those kids in danger. Frame messaging in the values of parenting and protecting young people, providing voters with the reassurance that we know *they* are good parents, but acknowledging that not all homes are safe.

**After addressing the issue, pivot to broader educational issues** like keeping schools funded and ensuring every child has access to both high quality education and mental health resources. Creating this abundance mindset reminds voters that not only transgender kids need access to mental health resources and quality education, all kids need this and should have access to it.

### Recommended Message

- **Most parents know their kids would come to them if they needed help.**

- **And we all want kids to be safe. Unfortunately though, not all kids live in homes where healthy communication happens, and some transgender teens are afraid of getting kicked out of their homes, beaten, or worse.**
- **We should not force teachers to knowingly put those kids in danger and violate that trust they build with their students.**
- **My focus is making sure our schools are funded, and every child has access to high quality education and the mental health resources they need – not passing more laws about transgender kids.**

## BATHROOMS

**When it comes to bathroom bans, start by calling out the opposition, and then pivot quickly.** Thinking about public bathrooms is generally unpleasant, so it does not help us to spend time talking in detail about bathroom policies. Focus on calling out politicians for pushing bathroom bans to score political points, when they should be focusing on higher-priority issues (i.e. improving the economy and addressing rising costs).

**If pushed, highlight the confusing and difficult nature of enforcing these bans.** We do not get significant backlash when pointing out that these bans would be complicated to enforce, i.e. they would require people who have transitioned already to use the bathroom of their sex at birth. Pointing this out is helpful if you have to spend time on this issue.

### Recommended Messages

- **Politicians are trying to make an issue out of transgender people using a bathroom to score political points and scare people.**
- **While they're focused on who is using what bathroom, we should be focused on lowering costs, addressing crime, and getting our economy back on track.**
- **IF PRESSED:  
These bans will just create more confusion, and are impossible to enforce. They would force transgender people who have already transitioned, and look like the gender they transitioned to, to use the restroom of their birth gender. This will just cause more confusion and discomfort for everyone.**

## SPORTS

**On transgender participation in sports, emphasize that local schools and athletic leagues should make these decisions, not politicians.** We are on the strongest ground on this issue when arguing that schools and leagues should make these decisions, not politicians.

**After you make that point clearly, you can pivot to higher-priority issues.** Once you are clear on this position, you can pivot to addressing economic issues that voters are more focused on.

### Recommended Message

- **Local schools and sports associations should be handling this issue, not politicians.**
- **We need elected officials focused on solutions to real problems like lowering everyday costs for working families.**

## NUMBER OF GENDERS

**Right-wing debaters like to use this “gotcha” question.** A common right-wing “gotcha” technique is to put a progressive opponent on the spot by asking them how many genders there are, in the hope that their progressive opponent will respond with an overly-complex-sounding answer to this seemingly simple question.

**A simple sequence provides an effective answer.** When facing the “number of genders” question, begin by acknowledging the expected answer, then acknowledge things can also be more complicated, and conclude by focusing on the widely held value that everyone should be treated with respect.

### Recommended Message

- **As we all know, the vast majority of people identify as either male or female.**
- **For a few people, their situation is more complicated. I’m not a scientist, but I do know that for that small number of people, their experience of gender is different.**
- **The important thing is that every American, no matter their gender, is respected and protected the same as every other American.**

## Don'ts

- **Don't engage in a prolonged back-and-forth, particularly on bathrooms and sports.** While it might be interesting to discuss the policy specifics at length, it is most effective to quickly rebut the attack and then pivot to arguing that we should be focusing on issues that are priorities across the board, like costs and the economy. Particularly when it comes to bathroom bans, prolonged engagement – even when driven by our own positive messages – is not helpful. Some voters also have a sense that more rights for transgender people may be in some way zero-sum for individuals who are not transgender. Addressing the attack succinctly and then pivoting to higher priorities is powerful.
- **On bathrooms, do not point to existing laws that make harassment illegal.** This has been an effective strategy in the past, but is no longer effective, and in fact puts people in the headspace of imagining people unsafe in bathrooms. The less imagery in bathrooms we conjure in our answers, the better.

- **On healthcare, do not talk about the importance of this medical care for transgender youth – or the autonomy of young people – rather, focus on parents and doctors knowing best in an electoral context.** When we talk about the importance of allowing a transgender young person to live as the gender they know themselves to be, we ask voters to *support* medical transitions, which is not where they are. Rather, we want them to *oppose bans*, which is more achievable and does not pressure them to go further than where they currently are in their own confusion around this topic. Bringing up young people’s autonomy or agency creates immediate backlash as voters consider their own past impetuous behavior and mistakenly connect that to being transgender.
- **Avoid using terms that are unfamiliar** or imply that this care is different from other medical care – e.g., “gender-affirming care.” Instead, use familiar language like health care or medical care.
- **On forced outings, don’t make this a bureaucratic argument about paperwork or administration for schools and teachers.** Voters have empathy for transgender teens who may live in unsupportive homes, and also for the emotional burden this policy would put on teachers forced to knowingly put a student in danger. However, while voters do believe that teachers have a lot on their plates to juggle, this is not effective when framed as another administrative chore. The emotional burden is the key.
- **On both sports and healthcare, avoid engaging on specific examples.** The point is that politicians are not the qualified decision-makers on these issues. After making that point, it is unhelpful to then take on the role of decision-maker by litigating very specific situations. Instead of engaging on examples – real or hypothetical – go back to the core values of political interference and who decides.

### How to Pivot Effectively

In many instances, speakers will want to pivot to higher priority topics to reflect voters’ priorities. Faced with a direct specific question, it’s critical to *first* briefly answer the question with a thought or two *before* pivoting, to show that the speaker is listening and is not afraid of the question or dodging the topic. Pivoting immediately, without first addressing the audience’s concerns, is not recommended because it reduces the credibility and authenticity of the speaker.

For example:

*Challenge:*

So you think it’s fine for teachers to know more about a kid’s gender than their parents do?

*Values statement:*

In the vast majority of these situations, parents are very involved. We all want to keep kids safe though, and unfortunately, not all kids live in homes where healthy communication happens, and some transgender teens are afraid of getting kicked out of their homes, beaten,

or worse. We should not force teachers to knowingly put those kids in danger and violate that trust they build with their students.

*Contrast with opposition:*

So while my opponent wants to create a big panic about transgender kids [to score political points]...

– or –

So while my opponent wants to make this election all about [controlling] transgender kids...

*Pivot to priority issue:*

... I'm focused on raising incomes and lowering everyday costs for working families.

– or –

... I'm focused on making sure our schools are funded, and every child has access to high quality education and the mental health resources they need

The following language may also be useful, particularly when pivoting to higher-priority topics:

- I'm just not going to make this election all about transgender people. I'm going to focus on the issues that matter to us every day – like lowering costs for working families.
- This should be a medical question, not a political one.
- They're ringing that false alarm again, trying to get us worked up.
- We already have enough separation and polarization going on.
- I don't know about you, but I just find it exhausting, this constant stirring up of more and more controversy.
- At the end of the day, I'm not going to get into a big panic about transgender people – I'm going to focus on raising incomes and lowering costs for working families.

## Contact

Please contact Adrienne Kimmell ([AKimmell@sparksolutions.us](mailto:AKimmell@sparksolutions.us)) on the independent side or John Neffinger ([John@KNPcommunications.com](mailto:John@KNPcommunications.com)) on the coordinated side with any questions or feedback.