

February 28, 2024

Speaker of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, Charles McCall
President Pro Tempore of the Oklahoma Senate, Greg Treat
Senate Minority Leader, Kay Floyd
House Minority Leader, Cyndi Munson
Senate Education Committee Chair, Adam Pugh
House Education Committee Chair, Rhonda Baker

Oklahoma State Legislature
2300 N Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Subject: Request to Investigate Oklahoma Department of Education and Remove State Superintendent Ryan Walters

Our community has experienced a terrible loss. On February 7, Nex Benedict, a 16-year-old 2STGNC+ (Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender non-conforming+) student of Choctaw descent, was brutally assaulted in the bathroom at Owasso High School and died the next day. Nex's death comes at a time when politicians from around the country—including Ryan Walters, Oklahoma's State Superintendent of Public Instruction—have pushed forward a record number of anti-2SLGBTQI+ (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex) bills and policies which disproportionately target and impact transgender, nonbinary, and gender expansive youth.¹

The undersigned organizations call on the Oklahoma Legislature to immediately remove Ryan Walters from his position as Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction and to begin an investigation into the Oklahoma Department of Education to determine what actions and policies have led to a culture where rampant harassment of 2SLGBTQI+ students has been allowed to go unchecked.

Superintendent Ryan Walters is responsible for fostering a culture of violence and hate against the 2SLGBTQI+ community in Oklahoma schools.² Just a month ago, he passed an emergency rule to prevent an Oklahoma teen who was fearful of being bullied from changing his gender on school files.³ He called for the firing of a principal who performed in drag on weekends, which led to violent threats against the educator.⁴

Walters also empowered other anti-2SLGBTQI+ extremists to have power over Oklahoma schools. In 2022, Chaya Raichik, the creator of the extremist anti-LGBTQ social media account "Libs of TikTok," targeted a teacher at Nex's school for their support of 2SLGBTQI+ students;

¹ ACLU. "Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures in 2024" ACLU. <https://bit.ly/42OFxTI>

² GLAAD. "Ryan Walters." GLAAD Accountability Project, Accessed February 23, 2024. <https://www.glaad.org/gap/ryan-walters/>

³ NBC News. "A transgender teen wanted to update his school records. Oklahoma created a rule to stop him." NBC News. January 9, 2024. <https://nbcnews.to/3lcvo9Y>

⁴ The Washington Post. "Oklahoma principal forced out after being targeted for drag career." The Washington Post. February 14, 2024. <https://wapo.st/3uQtUPC>

this teacher later resigned.⁵ Last year, Raichik posted a video attacking an Oklahoma school librarian who supports 2SLGBTQI+ students, resulting in six days of bomb threats against the school.⁶ Instead of standing up for the students and educators in Oklahoma, Walters uplifted the post about the librarian and appointed Raichik to the state's library board, despite her not living in Oklahoma and having no credentials for the position.⁷ Superintendent Walters' reprehensible conduct shows a willful rejection of his duty to protect the health and welfare of the children in Oklahoma's public schools and instead has created an environment that allows for hostility and harm for youth like Nex.

In the weeks following Nex's death, numerous youths have come forward to detail the rampant harassment of Oklahoma's 2SLGBTQI+ students by peers, teachers, and administrators. We are outraged that a climate of hate and bigotry has been not only allowed to thrive, but encouraged by the person who is responsible for education in the state of Oklahoma. State officials must be held accountable for bringing the politics of hate into Oklahoma's schools and making our most vulnerable youth pay the price.

Nex's life demands justice. All students, including all Two-Spirit, gender non-conforming, transgender, and non-binary students like Nex, have the right to feel safe and protected while attending school. Indigenous peoples, such as Nex, are subjected to brutal violence of this sort due in part to the continued occupation of their lands, the devaluation of our youth, in addition to being gender and sexual minorities (2SLGBTQI+). This brutality is connected to the missing and murdered Indigenous persons (MMIP) crisis and reflective of the elevated murder rates of Indigenous peoples.

We urge you to protect the students of Oklahoma and immediately correct course by impeaching and removing Superintendent Walters and investigating the impact of Walters' policies and rhetoric on Oklahoma students and schools. It is imperative that all students in the state are supported.

Sincerely,

Organizations Based in or Serving Oklahoma:

Burning Cedar Sovereign Wellness
Campaign for Southern Equality
Church of the Open Arms & Cathedral of Hope OKC
Community Care by Trust Women
Cousins
D. Hammond & Associates, PLLC
Diversity Center of Oklahoma
Diversity Family Health

⁵ Fox23. "Parents divided after former Owasso teacher resigns following viral TikTok videos." Fox23. April 14, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3SNiqEF>

⁶ Rolling Stone. "Tulsa School District Closes After Wave of Bomb Threats Fueled by Conservative TikTok Users." Rolling Stone. August 30, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3uUx84C>

⁷ NBC News. "Libs of TikTok creator accused of inspiring school bomb threats named to Oklahoma library board." NBC News. January 23, 2024. <https://nbcnews.to/3UUF3cT>

End HIV Oklahoma
First Unitarian Church of Oklahoma City
Foundation for Liberating Minds
Freedom Oklahoma
Hopkins Law and Associates, P.C.
Let's Fix This
Lumina: Queer Student Alliance
Matriarch
Metriarch®
Mingalar Myanmar Alliance, Inc.
National Lawyers Guild, Oklahoma Chapter
OKC Democratic Socialists of America
OKC DSA Queer
Oklahoma Action Chorus
Oklahoma City Pride
Oklahoma Faith Network
Oklahoma Pride Alliance
Oklahomans for Equality
Open Arm Photography & Art
OUHSC Black Student Association
PFLAG Enid OK
PFLAG Norman
PFLAG OKC
PFLAG Stillwater
PFLAG Tulsa
Planned Parenthood Great Plains Votes
Rural Oklahoma Pride
SOJOURN: Southern Jewish Resource Network for Gender & Sexual Diversity
Stand For the Silent
Starbucks Workers United OKC
TahEquality
The Normal Anomaly Initiative, Inc.
Trans Advocacy Coalition of Oklahoma
Trust Women Foundation
Tulsa Infectious Disease & AIDS League (TIDAL)

National Organizations:

Advocates for Youth
AFT
Agape MCC
American Association of School Librarians
American Atheists
American Humanist Association
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Arab American Institute

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Athlete Ally
Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Center for American Progress
Center for Freethought Equality
CenterLink: The Community of LGBTQ Centers
Coalition for Responsible Home Education
COLAGE
Defense of Democracy
EducateUS
Envision:You
Equality Federation
Family Equality
FFRF Action Fund
FORGE, Inc.
Gender Justice League
GLAAD
GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ+ Equality
GLSEN
GSA Network
Health Justice Commons
Human Rights Campaign
I Am Human Foundation
Interfaith Alliance
It Gets Better
Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)
Knit the Rainbow, Inc.
Lambda Legal
Matthew Shepard Foundation
MomsRising
Movement Advancement Project
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Inc.
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE)
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Education Association
National Harm Reduction Coalition
National LGBT Cancer Network
National LGBTQ Task Force
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Trans Bar Association

National Women's Law Center
Our Schools USA
PFLAG National
Plume Health
Positive Women's Network-USA
Project HEAL
Public Justice
QFPP
Queer Equity Institute
Rainbow Youth Project USA
Sam & Devorah Foundation for Trans Youth
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Shakina Inc.
SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change
State Innovation Exchange (SIX)
The Advocacy Institute
The Center for Constitutional Rights
The Center for HIV Law and Policy (CHLP)
The Sikh Coalition
The Trevor Project
The Unitarian Universalist Association
Trans Formations Project
TransFamiy Support Services
Transgender Law Center
Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund (TLDEF)
True Colors United
UFCW OUTreach
UltraViolet
Unity Fellowship Church Movement

State and Local Organizations Outside of Oklahoma:

Affirmations Community Center
AIM IT; WI
All Peoples Church Unitarian Universalist
All Rainbow and Allied Youth
All Under One Roof LGBTQ ADVOCATES of Southeastern Idaho
Alliance for Full Acceptance
API Equality-LA
APLA Health
Arkansas Black Gay Men's Forum
Bellingham Queer Collective
Big Sky High School Gender Sexuality Alliance
Black Pride NOLA
Borderland Rainbow Center
Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center

Callen-Lorde Community Health Center
CAMP Rehoboth, Inc.
Center for Immigrant Protection
Centre LGBT+
Charlotte Trans Health
CoastPride
Communication Madison
Diverse & Resilient
Diversity Alliance of the Puget Sound
Diversity Collective
Diversity Collective Ventura County
Eastern PA Trans Equity Project
Edge New Jersey
El/La Para TransLatinas
Embrace United Church of Christ
EmpowerMT
Equality Arizona
Equality California
Equality Connecticut
Equality Delaware
Equality Nevada
Equality New Mexico
Equality New York
Equality North Carolina
Equality Ohio
Equality South Dakota
Equality Texas
Equality Virginia
Fair Wisconsin
Fairness Campaign
FAIRNY
Faith Commons
Family Voices NJ
First Unitarian Church of Dallas
Flamingo Democrats
Fortaleza Familiar
Four Corners Rainbow Youth Center
Freedom, Inc.
FreeState Justice
Galileo Christian Church
Garden State Equality
Gender Justice (Minnesota and North Dakota)
Gender Justice LA
GenderNexus
Georgia Equality
Georgia Safe Schools Coalition

GLYS Western New York
GMHC
Grand Rapids Trans Foundation
GSAFE
Guilford Green Foundation & LGBTQ Center
GVSU YDSA/SDS
Hawai'i LGBT Legacy Foundation
He She Ze and We
Henderson Equality Center
Hetrick-Martin Institute
Hudson Pride Center
Hudson Valley LGBTQ Community Center
Hugh Lane Wellness Foundation
Identity Inc.
Immune Boosters
inclusion tennessee
Inside Out Youth Services
Lancaster LGBTQ+ Coalition
LGBT Center of Greater Reading
LGBT Center of Raleigh
LGBT Center of SE Wisconsin
LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland
LGBT Community Center of Long Island, Inc.
LGBT Community Network
LGBTQ Center OC
LGBTQ Community Organizer GV
Live Out Loud
Long Island Gay and Lesbian Youth, Inc. (LIGALY)
Long Island SAGE
Los Angeles Bi+ Task Force
Los Angeles LGBT Center
Louisiana Trans Advocates
Louisville Youth Group
Madison Anarcha Collective
MaineTransNet
Mainline
Makom Shelanu Congregation
Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition
MassEquality
Mazzoni Center
Middle Tennessee Democratic Socialists of America
Middleton Hills Trans Anarchist Collective
Monterey Peninsula Pride
Montgomery Pride United/ Bayard Rustin Community Center
Mountain Pride
Muncie OUTreach LGBTQ+ Center

Naper Pride
National Council of Jewish Women Texas
New Bern Pride
New Haven Pride Center
North County LGBTQ Resource Center
North Dakota Human Rights Coalition
North Shore Alliance of GLBTQ+ Youth (NAGLY)
Northwest Arkansas Equality, Inc.
NoVA Prism Center
NY LGBT Network
Ogden Pride
One Colorado
One Iowa
one-n-ten
Openhouse
Our Center
Out Boulder County
Out in the Open
OUT MetroWest
Out On The Lakeshore
Out Professional Engagement Network
OutCenter Southwest Michigan
OutFront Kalamazoo
OutFront Minnesota
OUTMemphis
OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center
Pacific Center for Human Growth
Pacific Pride Foundation
PEAK Parent Center
PFLAG FW
PFLAG Mount Horeb Chapter
Pittsburgh Equality Center
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Wisconsin
Positive Images
Pride at Work AFL-CIO Rochester Finger Lakes Chapter
Pride Center of Terre Haute Inc.
Pride Community Center, Inc
Pride Foundation
Prism United
PROMO Missouri
Public Advocates
QSpace Bismarck, North Dakota
Queermunity
QUEERSPACE collective
Rainbow Pride Youth Alliance
Rainbow Rose Center

Rainbow Seniors ROC, Inc
Red River Rainbow Seniors
Red River Unitarian Universalist Church - Denison
Resource Center
Ricky's Pride
Rochester Rainbow Union
Sacramento LGBT Community Center
San Diego Pride
San Francisco AIDS Foundation
San Gabriel Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Seattle's LGBTQ Center
Shenandoah LGBTQ Center
Shoals Diversity Center
Silver State Equality-Nevada
Sincecombahee Educational Consulting
SMYAL
Social Action Council, First UU Church of Austin
Solano Pride Center
SQSH (St. Louis Queer+ Support & Healing)
St. Luke's in the Meadow Episcopal Church
St. Vrain Safe Schools Coalition
Still Bisexual
Stonewall Columbus, Inc
Sussex Pride
Tennessee Equality Project
Texas Freedom Network
Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry
The California LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network
The Center for Sexuality & Gender Diversity
The Center on Colfax, Denver
The Center Project
The Diversity Center of Santa Cruz County
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center
The LGBT Center, NYC
The LGBTQ Center (South Bend, IN)
The LGBTQ Community Center of the Desert
The LOFT LGBTQ+ Community Center
The Parents' Place of MD
The Pride Center at Equality Park
The San Diego LGBT Community Center
The Source LGBT+ Center
Therapy Center of Philadelphia
Trans Advocacy Madison
Trans Maryland
Trans Resistance Action Committee
Transformation Project

Transformation Project Advocacy Network
Transgender Awareness Alliance
Transinclusive Group
TransOhio
TransSOCIAL, Inc.
Triangle Community Center
Tzedek Georgia
U.D.T.J.
Unitarian Universalist Church of Oakcliff
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hidalgo County Texas
University Church
Uptown Gay and Lesbian Alliance (UGLA)
Veterans and Military Alliance
Washington County Gay Straight Alliance, Inc.
Waves Ahead Corp
We Are Family
Westside Unitarian Universalist Church
William Way LGBT Community Center
Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Wisconsin Public Education Network
Wyoming Equality
Youth Outlook
Youth OUTright WNC Inc
Youth Pride, Inc.
YouthSeen