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**POSITION
STATEMENT**
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APSAC Position Statement

Gender-Affirming Care Is Not Child Abuse

The mission of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) is **to improve society's response to the abuse and neglect of its children**. APSAC envisions a world where all maltreated or at-risk children and their families have access to the highest level of professional commitment and service. APSAC strongly opposes recent attempts to criminalize and prohibit gender-affirming care as child abuse. Gender-affirming care is not child abuse.

Transgender youth are at risk for negative physical and mental health and life outcomes.¹ Research suggests that these negative outcomes are attributable to societal bias and discrimination rather than transgender identity itself. Recent research demonstrates that transgender youth who are affirmed in their identity experience lower levels of risk.² Conversely, outlawing gender-affirming care will worsen outcomes for these youth.

Gender-affirming care is an important aspect of affirming the identity of, and mitigating the health risks to, transgender youth. Gender-affirming care has been defined as “health care that holistically attends to transgender people’s physical, mental, and social health needs and well-being while respectfully affirming their gender identity.”³ The [World Professional Association for Transgender Health](#) has established standards for gender-affirming care.⁴ The American Academy of Pediatrics has [repeatedly elucidated the careful evaluation necessary to successful treatment](#) of transgender and gender nonconforming youth along a continuum of care.⁵ This evaluation properly takes place in licensed behavioral health and medical settings, not the state legislature.

This week, the Attorney General and Governor of Texas declared that gender-affirming health care is already illegal under Texas law because it is child abuse; further, Attorney General Paxton stated that gender non-conforming and transitioning youth may be victims of “Munchausen’s syndrome by proxy,” an outdated term that is now called medical child abuse, a felony in that state. Medical child abuse includes situations where a parent intentionally makes their child sick and solicits unnecessary medical care in order to gain sympathy and attention. It has nothing to do with gender-affirming care. Governor Abbott directed the Department of Family and Protective Services to investigate all “incidents” of gender transition. All mandated reporters in Texas, including nurses, doctors, social workers, and teachers, are required to report such youth to the state or face criminal penalties. While Governor Abbott’s directive is

currently under temporary restraining order relative to two plaintiffs, it remains in force for others in Texas, where gender-diverse youth and their families remain under threat.

APSAC strongly opposes the characterization of gender-affirming care as child abuse when provided in accordance with professional and ethical responsibilities and accepted standards of care. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has defined “child abuse” as “words or overt actions that cause harm, potential harm, or threat of harm to a child.” (CDC, Child Maltreatment Surveillance: Uniform Definitions for Public Health, 2008.) Gender-affirming care is not child abuse. APSAC is uniquely qualified to make this judgment. APSAC is the most authoritative multidisciplinary professional society addressing child abuse and neglect in the United States for over 35 years. APSAC stands with the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), the [American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry](#), and many other prominent professional societies in making this statement.

Currently, dozens of bills have been proposed in state legislatures across the country that would ban gender-affirming care. Bills in [Idaho](#), [Tennessee](#), and [Alabama](#) appear likely to pass, resulting in prohibition of gender-affirming care and imposing reporting requirements. In Idaho and Alabama, gender-affirming care would be a felony. These bills, like the actions of Texas leaders, target and punish some of the most vulnerable youth in the United States, along with their health care providers and their parents. APSAC is strongly opposed to these bills.

Because gender-affirming care is so important to the health and well-being of transgender youth, traditionally a group at high risk of maltreatment, APSAC declares its support for transgender youth and rejects any characterization of gender-affirming care as “child abuse” or criminal activity.

References

[1] See, e.g., [Study: Transgender teens at higher risk of violence, suicide attempts](#) (AAP News, 2019); [Risk and Protective Factors in the Lives of Transgender/Gender Non-Conforming Adolescents](#) (J Adolesc Health. 2017 Oct; 61(4): 521–526); [Health Considerations for LGBTQ Youth](#) (CDC, 2019, collecting resources).

[2] See, e.g., [Transgender children supported in their identities show positive mental health](#) (Univ. of WA News, 2016) (source study reported in Pediatrics (AAP), [here](#)); [Embracing a gender-affirmative model for transgender youth](#) (APA, 2018).

[3] [Debate: Why should gender-affirming health care be included in health science curricula?](#) (BMC Medical Education, 2020).

[4] [Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People](#), version 7. World Professional Ass’n for Transgender Health (WPATH), 2012.

[5] [Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents](#). Pediatrics, 2018 Oct., 142:4.

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