



Speak Out Now

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Pride Month – A Time to Celebrate AND Fight Back!

June is Pride Month, dedicated to the struggles of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer people. It is a time to celebrate LGBTQ+ people, and recognize their many important contributions throughout history.

However, Florida's governor Ron DeSantis recently signed into law what some are calling the Don't Say Gay bill. The vague language of the bill bans instruction in grades K-3 regarding sexuality and gender, and could be applied to other grades as well. Teachers could be forced to avoid teaching about important historical LGBTQ+ figures, and students could be banned from discussing their family life if they have gay or trans parents, and more. Additionally, it makes it harder for ALL students to access mental and physical health services while making it easier for parents to take punitive measures against teachers.

The Don't Say Gay bill is just one of the most recent among an avalanche of attacks on LGBTQ+ people over the last few years. In 2018 there were 18 anti-LGBTQ+ bills across the U.S. So far this year, 238 bills are already proposed, 65 percent of which are anti-trans. That makes this year even worse than 2021, which was already deemed the worst in history for LGBTQ+ rights according to the ACLU.

Since 2018, nearly 670 anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been filed in total. These include laws that allow for discrimination against LGBTQ+ people on a religious basis, discrimination against trans people in sports, restriction of education on LGBTQ+ issues, and restriction of access to trans health services. All of this is happening regardless of the fact that popular opinion is trending in the opposite direction. A recent study shows that nearly eight out of every ten Americans, or 79 percent of the population, are in favor of laws to protect LGBTQ+ people from discrimination in work, schools, housing, and more.

These attacks have huge implications. Restrictions in education could make life much more dangerous for LGBTQ+ youth, who are often forced to navigate understanding their sexual orientation or gender identity without the support of their peers or family. Sympathetic school counselors and teachers are sometimes the only people who can help these youth

understand themselves and figure out how to survive in a hostile atmosphere. Educational materials like books that depict LGBTQ+ stories often play a major role in queer youth awakenings and can help generate greater understanding among peers. Some of the new laws could result in trans children being removed from loving and supportive families that follow the advice of leading physical and mental health experts to provide gender affirming health care to trans youth, which has been shown to save lives.

This is the result of a society that doesn't reflect the interests of the majority — a society that promotes hate and discrimination rather than equality and freedom. If we want a different world, we should take a chapter from LGBTQ+ history. All rights that queer people have today were won through struggle.

In fact, Pride Month was established to commemorate one such struggle: the Stonewall uprising in New York City. Stonewall was a gay bar, and one of the only places that queer people could socialize openly. Police periodically raided bars like Stonewall, arresting and physically or sexually assaulting those inside. During one of these raids on June 28, 1969, people decided enough was enough and fought back, sparking a movement.

Stonewall was one chapter among many decades of struggle. The fight continues today, and it is part of the fight for the liberation of Black people, Latinx people, women, and all the oppressed. These attacks on LGBTQ+ rights come at a time when abortion rights are being stripped away, racist violence continues, and wars, hunger, and poverty plague society.

We must fight these attacks, but we should have no illusions in this political system. The most important battles in the fight for liberation don't happen in the ballot box — they happen in the streets, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces when people get organized. As they sang in the Civil Rights Movement, "freedom is a constant struggle" and we cannot stop fighting until we have a society that is run by and for the majority, rather than the wealthy few.

So let's celebrate Pride by fighting for what we deserve!