

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.<sup>1</sup>

**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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> He called for the firing of a principal who performed in drag on weekends, which led to violent threats against the educator.<sup>4</sup>

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;

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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>

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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:**

AFT-OKLAHOMA

Burning Cedar Sovereign Wellness

Campaign for Southern Equality

Church of the Open Arms & Cathedral of Hope OKC

College Democrats of Oklahoma

Community Care by Trust Women

Cousins

D. Hammond & Associates, PLLC

Diversity Center of Oklahoma

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

<sup>6</sup> 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>

<sup>7</sup> 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>

Diversity Family Health  
End HIV Oklahoma  
First Unitarian Church of Oklahoma City  
Foundation for Liberating Minds  
Freedom Oklahoma  
Hopkins Law and Associates, P.C.  
International Student Organization  
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 City AFT, Local 2309  
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  
Red Dirt Collective  
Rural Oklahoma Pride  
SOJOURN: Southern Jewish Resource Network for Gender & Sexual Diversity  
Stand For the Silent  
Starbucks Workers United OKC  
TahlEquality  
The Normal Anomaly Initiative, Inc.  
The Respect Diversity Foundation  
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  
Hire Survivors Hollywood  
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  
NDN Collective  
Our Schools USA  
PFLAG National  
Plume Health  
Positive Women's Network-USA  
Pride At Work, AFL-CIO  
Project HEAL  
Public Justice  
QFPP  
Queer Equity Institute  
Queer Youth Assemble  
Rainbow Youth Project USA  
re|scripted  
Sam & Devorah Foundation for Trans Youth  
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)  
Shakina Inc.  
SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change  
South Asian SOAR  
State Innovation Exchange (SIX)  
The Advocacy Institute  
The Center for Constitutional Rights  
The Center for HIV Law and Policy (CHLP)  
The GenderCool Project  
The OUT Foundation  
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  
Davidson Academy Online's Sexuality and Gender Alliance  
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  
Elmhurst Pride Collective  
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  
Fionn Academy  
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  
Intransitive  
Justice Advocacy Network  
Justice Coordinating Council, First Unitarian Universalist Church, Houston  
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  
Library Defense  
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  
Love Lives in Seekonk  
Madison Anarcha Collective  
MaineTransNet  
Mainline  
Makom Shelanu Congregation  
Massachusetts Teachers Association  
Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition  
MassEquality  
Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs  
Mazzoni Center  
Middle Tennessee Democratic Socialists of America  
Middleton Hills Trans Anarchist Collective  
MoCo Pride Center, Inc  
Monterey Peninsula Pride  
Montgomery Pride United/ Bayard Rustin Community Center  
Mountain Pride  
Muncie OUTreach LGBTQ+ Center  
Naper Pride  
National Council of Jewish Women Texas  
NELA Pride  
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 Baltimore  
PFLAG Denver  
PFLAG FW  
PFLAG Greensboro  
PFLAG Mount Horeb Chapter  
PFLAG San Diego County  
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 Center San Antonio  
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  
SF LGBT 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  
Southern Colorado Equality Alliance  
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 Door  
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  
Transgender Education Network of Texas (TENT)  
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  
United American Indians of New England  
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  
Wkjc TLGB RADIO  
Wyoming Equality  
Youth Outlook  
Youth OUTright WNC Inc  
Youth Pride, Inc.  
YouthSeen