

WINTER 2024

# Advocates for Youth Congressional Digest



**ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH** partners with young people and their adult allies to champion youth rights to bodily autonomy and integrity, and to build power to transform policies, programs and systems to secure sexual health and equity for all youth. Since 1980, we have worked domestically in the United States, and globally with country-based partners, to develop programs and policies that are culturally relevant and center the rights of young people. **Be sure to check out our 2023 annual report!**

2024 will be a busy year for sexual and reproductive health and rights, and Advocates for Youth – and our Youth Activist Network – have jumped right in. Read on for a quick update on what we have been up to since November.



**Rights.**  
**Respect.**  
**Responsibility.**

**Advocates  
for Youth**  
Young. Powerful. Taking Over.

## **FY 2024 Appropriations**

### **Reject All Anti-LGBTQ and Anti-Abortion Budget Riders!**

Advocates for Youth calls upon Congress to reject any appropriations bills that contain riders that would restrict access to essential health care, including abortion, contraception, and gender-affirming care, whether in-person or via telehealth. Legislative and policy attacks on access to reproductive health care and gender-affirming care are attacks on young people's autonomy and their right to self-determination. Advocates joined 135 LGBTQ+ and reproductive rights organizations in a letter to Senate and House leadership to make clear that any appropriations bill or package that includes language attempting to block access to reproductive or gender-affirming care is completely unacceptable.



### **Oppose Proposed Cuts and Save HIV Funding!**

Advocates for Youth has joined 113 organizations in launching the [#SaveHIVFunding](#) campaign to oppose \$767 million in proposed cuts for HIV programs, advocate for robust FY24 funding, and urge Congress to honor the bipartisan commitment to end the HIV epidemic in the U.S. by 2030. We urge Congress to pass funding for HIV programs from the bipartisan Senate FY24 Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

(LHHS) appropriation bill without harmful policy riders that would limit or prevent delivery of these and other critical health services. Thank you to the Members of Congress who joined Congresswoman Maxine Waters' [Dear Colleague letter](#) seeking robust funding for domestic HIV/AIDS programs in FY 2024.

## **Key Budget Priorities**

- Remove Weldon from the FY25 budget. President Biden's current budget includes the harmful Weldon Amendment, an anti-abortion rider. Advocates for Youth joins the National Women's Law Center and other reproductive health, rights, and justice organizations in calling for its removal.
- Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPPP): We ask that you provide \$150 million in programmatic funding and \$6.8 million in evaluation transfer authority to support the continuation of a wide range of evidence-based and informed community approaches to healthy youth development and unintended pregnancy prevention.
- Support funding for CDC's School Based HIV Prevention by providing \$100 million for CDC's school-based HIV and STI prevention efforts within the Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) to enable robust assistance to states, districts, and schools in their efforts to support student health and to lead research on school health and a range of adolescent health behaviors.
- End abstinence-only funding by eliminating all funding for "sexual risk avoidance" programs, formerly called "abstinence-only-until-marriage". Put an end to this harmful grant program, regardless of new packaging, which has been proven completely ineffective at the primary goal of young people delaying sex until marriage.

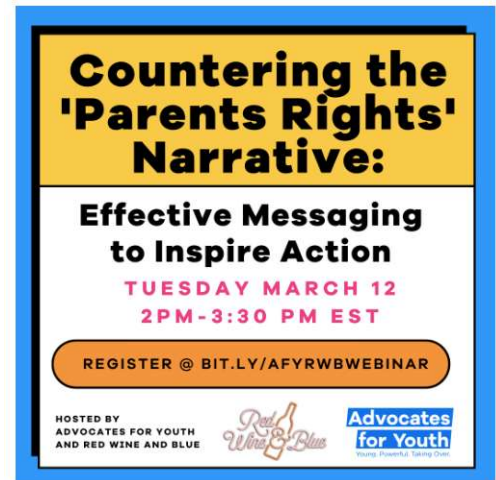


## Responding to “Parents’ Rights”

### Attacks Messaging

In the last year, over 60 so-called “parents’ rights” bills have been introduced in state legislatures, many focused on limiting sex education, banning books, mandating parental involvement in youth access to abortion and contraception, banning honest history lessons, or codifying bullying and discrimination against LGBTQ young people.

Advocates for Youth and [Red Wine and Blue](#) worked with [Perry Udem](#) and the [Center for Advancing Innovative Policy \(CAIP\)](#) to complete a messaging research project on how to counter the harmful parents’ rights messaging that has become synonymous with some of the far right’s most dangerous legislation.



We are hosting a webinar to share results from the national survey on Tuesday, March 12 at 2-3:30pm ET. This will be recorded and sent to all who [register](#).



### Cultivating Possibilities: White House Youth Policy Summit 2024

Advocates for Youth was nominated to attend Cultivating Possibilities: White House Youth Policy Summit 2024. The February summit, which was designed and planned in partnership with youth and hosted by the Department of Education, gave policymakers from federal agencies a chance to hear directly from young people and learn from one another about how to improve policies and programs to ensure that all youth have the opportunity to thrive.

Youth activists Sriha (CA), Eunice (DC), and Karen (AZ) asked the Administration to fund reproductive healthcare on college campuses and Community Health Workers, increase the Chafee Program’s annual grant to former foster care youth in college, and end all federal funding for Sexual Risk Avoidance programs. This group of 90 youth, federal agencies, and generous funders will reconvene in six months to follow up on the many initiatives that were discussed. To learn more, read the [Department of Education press release](#).

### Updated Title IX Rule Advances to OMB

On February 2nd, the Department of Education sent its long-awaited Title IX rule impacting student survivors, LGBTQ students, and pregnant and parenting students to the Office of Management and Budget for final review. In response, Emma Grasso Levine, Senior Manager of Title IX Policy and Programs at [Know Your IX](#) (a survivor- and youth-led project from Advocates for Youth), issued the following statement:

*“Know Your IX and Advocates for Youth applaud the Biden administration for taking the next step towards a Title IX rule with strengthened protections for survivors of sexual violence, LGBTQ+ students, and pregnant and parenting students. The updated guidance is the result of years of advocacy from students, many of whom experienced harm and disruption to their education because of bureaucratic delays and inaction to finalize new Title IX rules.*

*While today is an important milestone in the fight for comprehensive Title IX protections, the Department of Education must also finalize its guidance safeguarding transgender students' access to athletics. Equal access to sports is central to Title IX's purpose: protecting all students from gender discrimination. The Biden administration must act quickly to ensure both rules take effect as soon as possible. Survivors of sexual violence, LGBTQ+ students, and pregnant and parenting students cannot afford to spend any longer under policies that jeopardize their right to an education."* **The full Advocates for Youth statement is available [here](#).**

We call upon Congress to support our ask of the Biden administration to advance the Title IX athletics rule to OMB and finalize the new Title rules as soon as possible. We also ask you to oppose any amendments to the bill funding the Education Department and other key agencies that would prevent the Biden administration from implementing new Title IX protections for LGBTQI+ students, student survivors, and pregnant & parenting students.

### **[#FreethePill Calls for Opill to be Affordable, Available, and Accessible](#)**

Advocates for Youth and the #FreethePill Youth Council joined the Free the Pill coalition in a public letter to retailers (like CVS and Walgreens) and Perrigo (the manufacturer of Opill, the first over-the-counter birth control pill.) The letter urges the manufacturer and retailers to make Opill affordable, available, and accessible when it reaches the market later this year. The coalition is concerned that communities already facing contraceptive inequities will face the highest barriers to accessing contraception if Opill has a high retail price. The full letter is available [here](#) and more information can be found [here](#).

In December, Advocates for Youth also answered the Biden Administration's request for information seeking comments on coverage for a range of preventative over-the-counter items that can be purchased without a prescription, including contraceptives. Our comment focuses on the impact bringing the pill over the counter will have on young people, as well as the potential implementation challenges we foresee, including affordability and parental notification.



### **[Advocates Submits Amicus Brief to Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals](#)**

In January, Advocates for Youth – alongside partners If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice and the National Network of Abortion Funds – submitted an amicus brief to the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, in support of the plaintiffs in the case of *Matsumoto, et al. v. Labrador*. The brief argues that Idaho's recently passed Abortion Travel Ban, §18-623, which criminalizes trusted adults who support youth seeking abortion care, exacerbates existing barriers young Idahoans face when attempting to access an abortion and actively harms their health, safety, and well-being. This is especially true for youth from marginalized communities and those with multiple intersecting identities. We will continue to monitor the outcome of the appeal.



## YouthASC Regional Co-Lead Retreat

Meet our 13 YouthASC Regional Co-Leads, pictured below! The inaugural cohort of young people from across the country is ready to become abortion support resources and organizers in their communities. The group convened in January for a weekend-long retreat in Washington, DC to bond, conduct values explorations, and brainstorm abortion support ideas to take home and implement in their communities. The activists from Massachusetts, New York, DC, Maryland, North

Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Nevada represent seven regions: New England, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, South, Upper Midwest, Midwest, and West Coast.

## Know Your IX Actions in D.C.

On December 5, Know Your IX hosted a rally in front of the White House to call on the Biden administration to issue the final Title IX rule now. Activists were joined by our partners from the National Women's Law Center, GLSEN, and The Every Voice Coalition. Survivors of sexual assault, LGBTQ+ students, and pregnant & parenting students should not be living with Trump-era rules at their school – especially when President Biden promised to reverse that dangerous policy. For the past two and a half years, students have been devastatingly impacted by the Trump/DeVos Title IX rule, which rolled back students' civil rights. The rally was covered in [The 19th](#) (pickup from [Ms.](#), [Government Executive](#)), [USA Today](#), [LGBTQ Nation](#), and [Politico](#).



After the Day of Action, Know Your IX student activists and staff met with Senator Bob Casey's office to discuss the need for the reintroduction of the Students Access to Freedom and Educational Rights (SAFER) Act.

## EC Access Network

The Emergency Contraception (EC) Access Network is underway! The project is a nationwide ambassador program for young people to distribute FREE emergency contraception on college campuses.

**Six EC brands donated more than 130,000 packs of EC pills to the Network**, and we have selected 500 students to participate.





## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHTS

### → [Survey: Campus Reproductive and Sexual Health Access](#)

A new report released this month from Advocates for Youth and reproductive and sexual health virtual clinic Hey Jane indicates that the majority of young people around the country face challenges when accessing reproductive health care on campus, often turning to telehealth and off-campus options due to concerns including privacy, comfort, stigma, and reliability. The full report is available [here](#).

### → [Survivors Speaking Out: A Toolkit About Defamation Lawsuits and Other Retaliation by and for People Speaking Out About Sex-Based Harassment](#)

The National Women's Law Center and Know Your IX are proud to present **Survivors Speaking Out: A Toolkit About Defamation Lawsuits and Other Retaliation by and for People Speaking Out About Sex-Based Harassment**. This toolkit was written by students, survivors, and advocates, many of whom have spoken out about sex-based harassment and then faced defamation lawsuits and other retaliation. Our goal in writing this toolkit is to help survivors understand their rights, risks, and options when deciding whether to speak out and, if so, how to do it as safely as possible.

### → [Fact Sheet: Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights Resolutions Agreements](#)

We are waiting for the Biden administration to finalize its Title IX rule regarding sex-based harassment, LGBTQI+ students' rights, and pregnant and parenting students' rights. In the meantime, Know Your IX partnered with the National Women's Law Center and the Every Voice Coalition to create this resource to help students who have experienced sex-based harassment or discrimination at school. These resolutions explain how the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has enforced the Trump administration's Title IX rule to help students who have experienced harassment or discrimination, even before the Biden Title IX rule is finalized.

### → [Trans-Affirming Schools Project Resource Guide](#)

Transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive identities are not something to be debated: Transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive adults exist. Transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive youth exist. We have always existed and we will continue to prevail. Leaders and lawmakers who have a responsibility to keep us safe and work in our best interests, whether by job description or sworn oath, are not. This guide was developed as a direct response to the onslaught of anti-transgender disinformation and legislation in the U.S.

## KEY POLICIES & LEGISLATION

### Advocates for Youth asks for the following support:

- The **Equality Act (H.R. 15) (S. 5)** was reintroduced in June 2023 by Representative Mark Takano (D-CA) and Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR). This bill would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to explicitly protect the LGBTQI+ community from discrimination in healthcare, employment, schools, shelters, and more. The act specifically protects transgender young people who have been the target of transphobic attacks in states all across the nation. It would also ensure that institutions receiving federal funds cannot refuse services based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Please consider joining the current 216 co-sponsors in the House and 51 co-sponsors in the Senate.
- The **LGBTQI+ Data Inclusion Act (H.R. 3970) (S. 1839)** was introduced in June 2023 by Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ) and Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI). This legislation would facilitate the collection of voluntary, self-disclosed demographic data on sexual orientation,

gender identity, and variation in sex characteristics across federal surveys, while maintaining necessary confidentiality and privacy standards that govern federal statistics. Please consider joining the current 172 co-sponsors in the House and 19 co-sponsors in the Senate.

- The **Safe Schools Improvement Act (H.R. 6031) (S. 3105)** was introduced in October 2023 by Representative Linda Sánchez (D-CA) and Senator Bob Casey (D-PA). This legislation would require schools to enumerate sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics in anti-bullying and harassment policies. Please consider joining the current 163 co-sponsors in the House and 39 co-sponsors in the Senate.
- The **Real Education and Access for Healthy Youth Act of 2023 (H.R. 3583) (S. 1697)** was reintroduced in May 2023 by Representatives Barbara Lee (CA), Pramila Jayapal (WA), and Alma Adams (NC) and Senators Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Cory Booker (D-NJ). REAHYA would offer the first federal grants for comprehensive sex education programs in the United States and end investments in harmful Title V abstinence-only programs. Please consider joining the current 39 co-sponsors in the House and 14 co-sponsors in the Senate.
- The **Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance (EACH) Act of 2023 (H.R. 561) (S. 1031)** was reintroduced in January 2023 by Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) and Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Patty Murray (D-WA), and Mazie K. Hirono (D-HI). The bill would eliminate the Hyde Amendment's ban on insurance coverage of abortion for people enrolled in Medicaid. Please consider joining the current 185 co-sponsors in the House and 33 co-sponsors in the Senate.
- The **Affordability is Access Act of 2023 (H.R. 3589) (S. 1698)** was introduced in May 2023 by Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-MA) and Senator Patty Murray (D-WA). This bill would require group health plans and group or individual health insurance coverage to provide coverage for over-the-counter contraceptives. Please consider joining the current 47 co-sponsors in the House and 33 co-sponsors in the Senate.
- The **Right to Contraception Act (H.R. 4121) (S. 1999)** was introduced in June 2023 by Representative Kathy Manning (D-NC) and Senator Ed Markey (D-MA). This legislation would protect an individual's ability to access and take contraceptives, and would protect a health care provider's ability to provide contraceptives and information related to contraception. Please consider joining the current 154 co-sponsors in the House and 41 co-sponsors in the Senate.
- The **Expanding Access to Family Planning Act (H.R. 4329) (S. 2207)** was introduced in June 2023 by Representative Sharice Davis (D-KS) and Senator Tina Smith (D-MN). This bill would fund the Title X Family Planning program, which provides comprehensive, confidential family planning and preventive health services, often to low-income or minority populations. Please consider joining the current 13 co-sponsors in the House and 21 co-sponsors in the Senate.
- The **Reproductive Health Care Accessibility Act (H.R. 4901) (S. 2544)** was introduced in July 2023 by Representative Cori Bush (D-MO) and Senator Patty Murray (D-WA). This bill would remove barriers and strengthen access to reproductive care for people with disabilities. Please consider joining the current 29 co-sponsors in the House and 18 co-sponsors in the Senate.
- The **Health Equity and Access under the Law (HEAL) for Immigrant Families Act of 2023 (H.R. 5008) (S. 2646)** was reintroduced in July 2023 by Representatives Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) and Nanette Barragán (D-CA), and Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ). This bill would ensure that immigrants and their families have access to the care and resources we need to lead healthy lives. Please consider joining the current 75 co-sponsors in the House and 10 co-sponsors in the Senate.
- The **Abortion Justice Act (H.R. 4303)** was introduced in June 2023 by Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), with Advocates for Youth and other reproductive justice movement partners attending the press conference. Advocates for Youth also participated in the Drafting Working Group. This groundbreaking piece of federal legislation charts a policy path forward, where abortion care is available, affordable, and accessible – while centering those most impacted by

abortion restrictions, including BIPOC communities, immigrants, and young people. Please consider joining the current 20 co-sponsors in the House.

- The **Support UNFPA Funding Act (H.R. 4166)** was introduced in June 2023 by Representative Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA). This bill would provide congressional support for the United Nations Population Fund and recognize the importance of the reproductive health agency's work. Please consider joining the current 120 co-sponsors in the House.
- The **Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) Protection Act of 2023** sponsored by Representative Jamie Raskin (D-MD) and Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) establishes a procedure for courts to dismiss and deter strategic lawsuits against public participation. This bill would positively impact survivors of sexual violence who are experiencing defamation and retaliation. We expect this bill to be reintroduced in March 2024.

**Advocates for Youth requests that you vote NO on the following legislation:**

- Advocates for Youth joined the National Women's Law Center and the Coalition for Pregnant and Parenting Students Advocacy in opposing the Pregnant Students' Rights Act (H.R. 6914). This proposed law is an anti-abortion bill that would not address key barriers to pregnant students' educational attainment, and instead would further shame and stigmatize people for their pregnancy outcomes. The full letter is available [here](#).