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EXPERT INSIGHT | Higher Education Reform Initiative & Center for 1776

RADICAL GENDER IDEOLOGY IS TRANSFORMING AMERICAN SOCIETY, AND AFPI IS FIGHTING BACK.

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TOPLINE POINTS

- ★ Rates of gender dysphoria among young people have exploded throughout the North Atlantic world in recent years, leading thousands of minors to seek experimental medical treatment with irreversible consequences. Several regulatory actions taken by the Biden Administrations will further aggravate these problems, including a radical rewrite of Title IX rules.
- ★ K–12 public schools are increasingly affirming children's social transition without parental notification or consent—putting them on the fast track to medical intervention. Schools are also allowing natal male students to complete in female athletics and to access intimate facilities once reserved for girls, raising serious fairness and safety concerns.
- ★ The America First Policy Institute's policy centers are leading the fight against radical gender ideology: to protect children from unnecessary medical interventions, parental rights in education, women's sports, religious liberty, and student due process and free speech rights at U.S. colleges and universities.

A transgender fever is gripping the North Atlantic world. According to a 2019 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study, an astonishing 1.8% of high school students now identify as transgender ([Johns et al., 2019](#)). A 2022 Pew research report puts the number of gender-nonconforming young adults even higher, at 5.1% of the U.S. population between the ages of 18 and 29 ([Brown, 2022](#)). In the UK, rates of gender dysphoria among teenagers increased by 4,400% during the second decade of the 21st century ([Shrier, 2020a](#)). The explosive growth in demand for transgender medical care has driven the number of comprehensive gender clinics operating in the U.S. up from only one in 2007 to more than 60 today ([Bazelon, 2022](#)).

Why are huge numbers of young people, for the first time in recorded history, suddenly demanding radical pharmaceutical and medical interventions so that they can present themselves as members of the opposite sex? A leading theory is that a social contagion has taken hold positing similarities between skyrocketing rates of trans-identification today and previous instances of peer contagion like anorexia ([Littman, 2018](#)). If friend groups are responding to the anxieties that inevitably come with puberty by adopting new gender identities (strongly encouraged by social media influencers during a period of the online immersion wrought by COVID-19 lockdowns), our Nation has every reason to fear many will face terrible pain, sadness, and regret in the years to come. The medical interventions that quickly follow “social transition” in children’s early teens—puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and sex-reassignment surgery—have tragic and irreversible consequences, including infertility, permanent body disfigurement, loss of sexual function, and chronic lifelong health problems.

The broader social and political consequences of the explosion of trans-identification among young people are transforming American society ([Brewer, 2022](#)). The America First Policy Institute (AFPI) has monitored all of these developments closely and is working to educate Americans and public leaders about policies that can help turn the tide.

The pain has been particularly acute for thousands of families ruptured by gender ideology’s hold over their children. K–12 schools are affirming the social transition of very young students while deliberately deceiving parents about their children’s mental health problems, sundering families’ trust in teachers and public education ([Pidluzny, Trainor & Zelden, 2022, p. 5–7](#)). Gender theory activists have developed curricula and materials for schools that range from obscene to outright pornographic ([Campana & Pidluzny, 2022a](#)). And young people are being taught that the most basic distinction they perceive in their daily interpersonal relations—between boy and girl—has no basis in nature, science, or Genesis.

At schools and universities around the country, students and teachers are being compelled to address each other by favored pronouns that do not correspond to biological sex—a clear violation of First Amendment free speech protections and religious exercise guarantees ([Pidluzny, 2021](#)). Men are muscling into women’s bathrooms and locker rooms, and sexual assault is covered up by school leaders ([Bernstein, 2021](#)). Natal males now compete against biological female athletes at every level, smashing women’s records and seizing their scholarship opportunities—all while making the playing field unsafe for biological women in the case of contact sports ([Campana & Pidluzny, 2022b](#)).

Doctors and caregivers, meanwhile, are being bullied into providing gender-affirming care by medical association standards and state laws against “conversion therapy” that effectively allow patients to self-diagnose and turn doctors into pandering dispensaries ([Shrier, 2020b](#)). Additionally, the religious liberty implications of the movement will be profound in the coming years. The movement is already raising new difficulties in the areas of the provision of goods and services by small businesses, allegations of employment discrimination, and freedom of conscience for religious leaders who counsel young people in states that forbid so-called conversion therapy.



Policymakers should be doing everything they can to protect young people from harm, secure parental authority over children's moral and intellectual development, and safeguard every American's constitutional rights. Instead, the highest-profile government actions taken to date will make things worse. The Biden Administration's proposed Title IX regulation, which redefines "sex" to include gender identity with respect to sexual harassment at schools that receive federal funds, will not only preempt state laws that protect children. It will also force K–12 schools and American universities to advance the radical gender ideology at the root of these problems (Pidluzny, Trainor & Zelden, 2022, p. 7–8). The U.S. Department of Agriculture even threatened to cut off federal funding for school lunch programs to schools that do not adhere to the administration's radical gender identity guidance directing schools to open women's restrooms and locker rooms to biologically male students ([Perry, 2022](#)).

In response to these growing concerns, AFPI is fighting back.

In late February, the Center for a Healthy America and Center for 1776 released a new [research report](#), *Gender Transition Medications and Surgeries for Children in the U.S.* ([Overton & Campana, 2023](#)). It shines a light on the widespread prescription of off-label puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones as well as sex-change surgeries to children, and it surveyed the current state of medical research. One of its topline conclusions: the U.S. currently has the most permissive laws and aggressive practices regarding transgender interventions for children compared to Western and Northern European nations—most of which are known for embracing liberal cultural policies. In effect, we are allowing doctors to experiment on our kids. The report makes a powerful case that action at the state level is urgently needed to “protect children from potentially harmful and irreversible sex reassignment surgeries and medications” (Ibid., p. 1). And it points to promising recent initiatives in Florida, Missouri, Tennessee, and Arkansas as models for other states to emulate.

AFPI has led the effort to protect women's sports. In October 2022, AFPI's Center for 1776 released a [grassroots toolkit](#), *The Debate about Transgender Participation in Women's Sports* ([Center for 1776, 2022](#)). The report explains who sets eligibility criteria in various leagues and at various levels of athletic competition and describes the debate regarding transgender participation in women's sports. It also provides an overview of the science that clearly establishes that biological males derive significant competitive advantages from the size and strength advantages that come with an androgenized body. Additionally, the toolkit includes a summary of the actions school boards, state legislatures, and national and international athletics federals can take to preserve the integrity of women's sports (and the safety of female athletes). AFPI has also convened a new coalition, Athletes for America, to raise awareness of this issue and others. One of its athletes described her personal experience competing against a biologically male athlete and explained that when they tied for first place, he was the one who received all the attention (and the trophy).

AFPI has been fighting the Biden Administration's radical rewrite of Title IX since it was first announced. In September 2022, AFPI submitted a 12,000-word [public comment](#) to the Department of Education documenting serious deficiencies with the Biden Administration's proposed revision to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 ([Pidluzny, Trainor & Zelden, 2022](#)). The rule would redefine “sex” to include “gender identity”—forcing schools to



treat boys and men who identify as female as girls and women. It is quite simply one of the most far-reaching executive actions ever contemplated. As AFPI's public comment explains: "the proposal violates the U.S. Constitution and a 2022 Supreme Court ruling, and [it] disregards core values of our Republic, including, but not limited to, due process and the presumption of innocence, religious liberty, freedom of speech, and parental rights in education. The proposed rule will also undermine the primary purpose of Title IX by discouraging female participation in specific educational activities."

During the public comment period, AFPI published and amplified a toolkit for parents, [The 9 on Title IX](#), detailing the most egregious problems with the proposal and urging Americans to submit their own comments ([America First Policy Institute, 2022b](#)). All told, the Department received 240,000 submissions. AFPI also published a [call to action](#) (and [associated one-pagers](#)) explaining how state legislators can act to protect female athletics, parental rights, sex-separate spaces in K–12 schools, and the due process rights of college students accused of sexual assault ([Pidluzny & Campana, 2022c](#); [Pidluzny & Campana, 2022d](#); [Pidluzny, 2022](#)).

AFPI is helping state leaders and activists to protect children, restore parental rights, and advance school choice. Educating state leaders so they can develop policies tailored to their constituents' specific needs and circumstances is central to our mission. Several policy centers have been advising state leaders as they develop bills to keep obscene materials out of the classroom, protect minors from experimental sex-change procedures, and ensure the integrity of female athletics. We are also continuing to lead the charge on school choice, which is the best way to create the educational alternatives families need, more urgently than ever now, with the push for gender ideology on the rise in our schools. To this end, AFPI experts have published resources for [activists](#), [parents](#), and [school board members](#) and even launched a new website, [America First Parents](#), all designed to help families and local leaders ensure schools are focused on creating a safe, educational environment for children ([America First Policy Institute & Texas Public Policy Foundation, n.d.](#); [America First Policy Institute, n.d.a](#); [America First Policy Institute, n.d.b](#)). The only way to end the school-to-clinic pipeline is to get gender ideology out of the classroom.

The Battles Ahead. The fight is far from over. The Biden Administration is busy promulgating new regulations. In late February, the Department of Education published a proposal to weaken protections for religious student groups on campuses that receive federal funding; this will allow LGBTQ activists to undermine student groups with a religious mission. In the coming months, we expect additional rulemaking on transgender participation in athletics at the K–12 and collegiate levels. AFPI will help lead efforts to educate Americans about what is happening and what policies will protect their freedoms.

At the federal level, AFPI will educate elected officials on meaningful policies that can safeguard parental rights. And we will continue to oppose the unlawful exercise of undelegated power that is politicizing our schools. Over the long term, we must work to circumscribe federal influence over K–12 public schools radically.

We also recognize that the most important battles to come are at the state and local levels. AFPI's Constitutional Litigation Partnership will continue to support actors on the ground,



working to protect young students in our schools against legal activists using the courts to advance their radical ideology. And we will continue to develop research and policy products to help states strengthen protections for religious liberty and ensure that children have access to the mental health services they need while being protected from experimental medical procedures.

The stakes are high. Radical gender ideology is anathema to the family and religion, vital building blocks of Western Civilization and the American constitutional republic. By teaching children to reject the foundational truths that biological sex differences are real and that the complementary union of a man and a woman is the strongest basis for a successful family unit, transgender activists are perpetuating beliefs that will make it harder for young people to find meaning and happiness in our political community (and harder for our political system of ordered liberty to endure).

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