

President – Emily Scott, MD, FAAP
Vice President/Treasurer – Jaime Stelzer, MD, FAAP
Secretary – Pat Clements, MD, FAAP
Past President – Tony GiaQuinta, MD, FAAP
Executive Director – Christopher Weintraut, JD
INAAP is Incorporated in Indiana



January 9, 2021

The Honorable Ed Charbonneau
200 W. Washington St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204
Via Email

Dear Senator Charbonneau:

Pediatricians in Indiana care for youth who identify as transgender and gender diverse in every part of our state. These youth and their families have a right to medical advice and interventions, and it is the goal of pediatric providers to deliver best-practice medical care for these individuals. Evidence-based guidelines recommend that transgender youth have access to comprehensive, gender-affirming, and developmentally appropriate health care. This includes the option to reversibly delay puberty until they have the opportunity to further explore gender identity, access psychosocial supports, and define appropriate treatment goals. By prohibiting physicians from providing a safe, inclusive clinical space, Senate Bill 224 directly prevents transgender youth from receiving evidence-based medical care and increases the risk of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicide in these children and adolescents.

Youth who identify as transgender face a multitude of healthcare disparities that stem from societal discrimination, inequitable laws, and lack of access to quality care. This contributes to feelings of rejection and isolation which negatively impact physical and emotional well-being, and leads to disproportionate rates of homelessness, physical violence in homes and communities, suicide, substance abuse and high-risk sexual behaviors. In the US Transgender Survey of nearly 28 000 respondents, it was found that among those who were out as or perceived to be TGD between kindergarten and eighth grade, 54% were verbally harassed, 24% were physically assaulted, and 13% were sexually assaulted; 17% left school because of maltreatment. According to the American Psychological Association, diverse gender expressions do not constitute a mental disorder. If a mental health issue exists, it most often stems from stigma, lack of protection of civil rights and negative experiences, including lack of support to develop and explore their identity. Studies show that suicide attempt rates adolescents who identified as “trans” were 4% among those with strongly supportive parents and as high as 60% among those whose parents were not supportive. By delivering gender-affirming care, pediatric providers seek to understand and appreciate the youth’s gender experience while working to assess gender concerns and assist youth and their families in medical decision-making. This provision of care is critical in preventing gender dysphoria, abuse, and stigmatization for these individuals.

The AAP works to ensure all children and adolescents, regardless of gender identity or expression, receive medical care to promote optimal physical, mental, and social well-being. Discrimination based on gender identity or expression, real or perceived, has a negative impact on the health outcomes of children, their families, and society. In accordance with these values,

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the Indiana AAP vehemently opposes SB 224, which prohibits gender-affirming, evidence-based medical care for transgender youth, and carries a felony or misdemeanor charge for physicians depending on the care provided. 1 in 4 adults who identified as transgender avoided a necessary doctor’s visit because of fear of being mistreated. Legislative interference with medical decision-making is damaging to the patient-physician relationship and will lead to poor outcomes for those who identify as transgender or gender diverse. By penalizing medical professionals for following existing standards of medical care, SB 224 is forcing physicians to violate their Hippocratic Oath to “do no harm” and preventing them from providing best-practice medical care for children and adolescents in Indiana. Finally, always and especially in an era when we are working towards health equity and in a time of the COVID 19 pandemic and vaccine rollout, health related legislation should focus on public health measures that extend beyond the individual patient and are outside the capacity of individual physicians or patients to control.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Stelzner', written over a horizontal line.

Sarah Stelzner
Advocacy Committee Chair, Indiana Chapter
of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Abby Esker
Member, Indiana Chapter
of the American Academy of Pediatrics