

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, February 15th, 2023

Press Contact: NYTTransSolidarity@gmail.com

180 New York Times contributors sign an open letter to the Standards editor critiquing the paper's coverage of trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people

New York, NY — Today a group of trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming *New York Times* contributors and member-organizers at the Freelance Solidarity Project, the digital media division of the National Writers Union, [independently published](#) an open letter to the *Times* Standards editor Philip B. Corbett decrying the failings of the paper's recent coverage of trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people.

175 and counting *New York Times* contributors have signed on as of Wednesday morning, along with 65 and counting additional media workers signing on in solidarity. Signees include **Chelsea Manning, Cynthia Nixon, Angelica Ross, Lucy Sante, Senator Nikil Saval, Alexander Chee, Ashley C. Ford, Roxane Gay, Kathryn Joyce, and David Velasco.**

Per the [Times' own reporting](#), states have introduced no fewer than 12 laws seeking to ban gender-affirming care for people under the age of 18 within the last year. Utah Governor Spencer Cox signed a bill [outlawing care for trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming minors](#) in late January 2023, while South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem signed a similar bill into law [just last week](#). Lawmakers in two states, South Carolina and Oklahoma, have even sought to ban such care for adults as old as 25. The criminalization and demonization of trans youth has real consequences: This letter arrives in the wake of the tragic murder of 16-year-old Brianna Ghey, which shows [all the hallmarks of a transphobic attack](#). "There are material consequences when we cede rhetorical ground," Muna Mire, a co-writer of the letter, said. "There are lives on the line."

American policymakers have increasingly drawn on the *Times'* coverage in order to justify enacting these draconian policies toward trans children and adults. "In two federal court cases last year, we saw legal briefs cite the *Times'* reporting in order to defend these vile, reactionary, scientifically backwards bans on gender-affirming medical care," Harron Walker, freelance journalist and letter co-author, said. "Not just its opinion pieces, though that happened, as well, but its purportedly objective editorial, too. If the *Times'* reporting on trans issues can so easily be weaponized against trans people, diminishing our bodily autonomy off the page, the unethical bias could not be more clear." This reporting also clearly plays into a broader and even more dangerous campaign by groups whose ultimate goal, according to the *Times'* reporting, is to [eliminate transition care for everyone](#).

The letter also draws on the *New York Times*' record of covering HIV/AIDS and the gay community, which the *Times* itself acknowledges as a blemish on its history. "The *Times* described queer subjects with clinical distaste for decades, intimidating its own closeted staffers," said Chris Randle, a co-author of the letter and a member of the steering committee at the Freelance Solidarity Project. "That long backlash against the supposed excesses of gay liberation made the paper fatally sluggish to report on the AIDS epidemic." As the letter points out, *New York Times* managing editor and executive editor A. M. Rosenthal neglected to put AIDS on the front page until 1983, by which time the virus had already killed 500 New Yorkers.

As Cecilia Gentili, longtime trans activist and co-author of the letter, said: "As anti-trans sentiments, and particularly 'concerns' about trans youth, become a rallying point for growing fascist movements worldwide, institutions like the *New York Times* must deeply consider the role their coverage is playing in advancing this bigotry. Pretending there are 'two sides' to whether or not trans kids have the right to exist as themselves is providing faux-progressive cover to far-right ideology that is currently steamrolling through state legislatures. I join hundreds of fellow opinion contributors and other public figures in demanding the *Times* reverse this trend and cover trans issues with fairness."

Relevant to this effort is the fact that the paper recently decided not to renew the contract of Jennifer Finney Boylan—for years, the only regular trans contributor to the *Times* Opinion section. Freelancers and former contributors are some of the only people with a stake in the *Times* as a workplace who are in a position to speak out. "Freelancers at the *Times* want to build a safer environment, for themselves and for their loved ones. Coming together to make these concerns heard is one of the few avenues they have for changing their workplace," said Eric Thurm, campaigns coordinator at the National Writers Union and a steering committee member of the Freelance Solidarity Project. The letter also builds on FSP-NWU's recent work organizing *Times* contributors [in solidarity with the Times Guild's one-day walkout](#) in December 2022, as well as *Times* staffers [organizing in opposition](#) to an op-ed openly calling for violence against Black protestors.

"*Times* contributors outside the queer community have seen our trans, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming family, friends, and colleagues misrepresented and marginalized within the paper for too long," freelancer and *Times* contributor Sean T. Collins said. "For our coworkers and loved ones, for persecuted people across the country and around the world, we have both the right and the duty to speak out about this dangerous trend."