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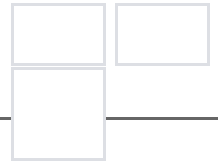
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# Some students see danger in Youngkin's policies on transgender students

BY CHRISTINA VAN WAASBERGEN - 09/01/23 10:35 AM ET

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Carys Owens

*Students at Fairfax High School in Virginia participate in a protest in September 2022 against the Youngkin administration's draft policies on transgender students.*

FAIRFAX, Va. — When recent Fairfax High School graduate Beatrice Stotz considers

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Virginia's new education policies on transgender students, she thinks about a friend of hers whose parents aren't supportive of her gender identity.

Among Virginia Gov. [Glenn Youngkin's](#) (R) recently finalized policies restricting the rights of transgender students is a prohibition on school districts creating policies to withhold information about students' gender identity from unsupportive parents.

Stotz, who is transgender, said she's fortunate enough to have a supportive family, but other trans students like her friend aren't so lucky.

"It's jarring to realize that she is the one that will be directly affected by these policies," Stotz said in an interview before graduation. "It is her life that will be uprooted because of these new regulations."

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In July, the Youngkin administration released a finalized version of policies governing the treatment of transgender students in Virginia public schools. That followed a draft version released last year that sparked statewide protests from students.

They require students to play on sports teams and use bathrooms associated with their sex assigned at birth, with modifications offered only to the extent required under federal law, and they prohibit school staff from referring to a student by a new name or pronouns without the permission of a parent.

But the move to allow school staff to share information with unsupportive parents is particularly concerning to LGBTQ advocates.

The proposed policies emphasize the importance of parental rights, something Youngkin campaigned on.

They say school districts may not “encourage or instruct teachers to conceal material information about a student from the student’s parent, including information related to gender.”

The only exceptions are when a law prohibits such disclosure. As an example, the policies point to a Virginia law prohibiting school staff from notifying parents that their child is at imminent risk of suicide if the reason is parental abuse or neglect.

Stotz is one of several Virginia high school students interviewed for this article who said they are concerned the state’s new policies could put transgender students at risk by outing them to their families.

For Stotz’s friend, who graduated this year, Youngkin’s policy could have meant being outed to her parents, who are conservative and don’t support her being

transgender. Stotz said her friend was out as transgender at school but presented as male at home. Being outed could have jeopardized her relationship with her parents, Stotz said.

Stotz said her friend is still not out to her parents, but she is now at college where she is more free to be herself.

Youngkin's policies are part of a wave of bills and policies targeting the LGBTQ community in states across the nation. In February, a Virginia Senate committee voted down a House bill that would have required school staff to notify parents if their children come out as transgender.

Even though the state's policies don't go that far, Breanna Diaz, policy and legislative counsel for the Virginia ACLU, which opposes the policies, said the rules could leave teachers feeling unsupported if they decide to

withhold such information from a student's parents.

She's also concerned conservative school districts could go further and create policies that require teachers to out transgender students.

For many trans youth, being outed to unsupportive families can present far greater dangers than just negatively impacting their relationship with their parents. According to the LGBTQ civil rights organization [Lambda Legal](#), 20 percent to 40 percent of homeless youth in the U.S. identify as LGBTQ. These youth are often kicked out by their parents or are fleeing abuse, the organization says.

Stotz organized a walkout of what she estimates was around 200 students at Fairfax High School to protest the draft policies. It was part of a series of walkouts across the state on Sept. 27, 2022, that was organized by the youth-led LGBTQ advocacy group

## Pride Liberation Project.

Recent South County High School graduate Zayd Khan, who helped lead the Pride Liberation Project, said the group has seen firsthand what can happen when a student is outed to unsupportive parents. Last year, the Pride Liberation Project raised more than \$4,500 to help a Fairfax County high school student who was disowned by their family after they were outed.

“It was very disheartening just because [of] the fact that parents will go to such lengths when they hear certain things about their child,” Khan said.

When questioned about concerns the policies could put transgender students' safety at risk, a Youngkin aide pointed to the exception regarding students who are suicidal due to parental abuse or neglect as an example of how the policies protect students from abuse.

Virginia law says that school districts are required to implement policies that “are consistent with but may be more comprehensive than” the state’s policies.

However, several school districts, including Fairfax County Public Schools, Richmond Public Schools and Arlington Public Schools, have said they won’t follow the policies.

Diaz said school districts who refuse to implement the policies could be opening themselves up to litigation from Virginia’s Attorney General, as well as from third parties, like conservative legal groups.

Virginia’s Attorney General issued an advisory opinion last month saying school districts are required to implement the state’s policies. Neither Youngkin’s office nor the Virginia Attorney General’s office answered The Hill’s inquiries about what they plan



to do about school districts that refuse to follow the policies.

The Attorney General's office deferred to Youngkin's office for comment. Youngkin spokeswoman Macaulay Porter said in an email, "The Virginia Department of Education has fulfilled its responsibility to develop the model policies, school boards are expected to follow the law."

The new rules differ sharply from Virginia's previous policies on transgender students, which were implemented in 2021 under former Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam.

Those policies said schools should "consider the health and safety of the student in situations where students may not want their parents to know about their gender identity, and schools should address this on a case-by-case basis. If a student is not ready or able

to safely share with their family about their gender identity, this should be respected.”

“Disclosing a student’s gender identity can pose imminent safety risks, such as losing family support or housing,” the 2021 policies said.

Last September, [WUSA9](#) asked Youngkin what he would say to a transgender student who isn’t supported by their family.

“I would say trust your parents,” Youngkin said. “You know, at the moment where there are very difficult issues in families and challenging issues in families, families come together. And this is why parents, in fact, have a role in their children’s lives.”

But former Pride Liberation Project lead organizer Rivka Vizcardo-Lichter, a junior in Fairfax County, said many LGBTQ youth aren’t able to safely rely on their parents.

“When we’re talking about the Youngkin administration, it almost seems as if they live in some world where all parents are good parents and all parents are supportive parents,” Vizcardo-Lichter said. “But unfortunately, that’s just not the case.”

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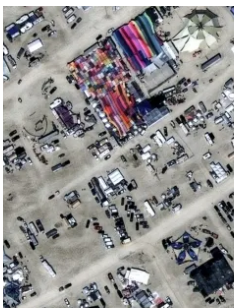
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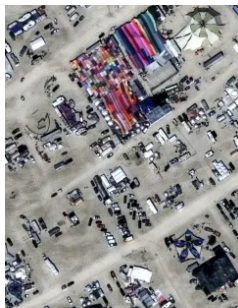
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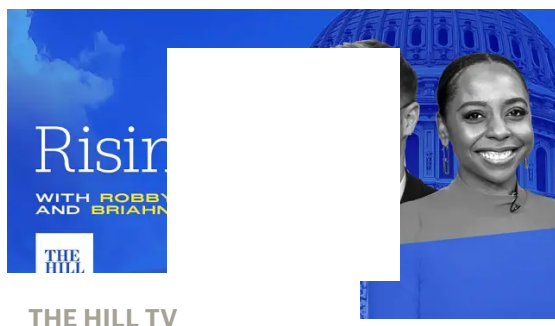
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