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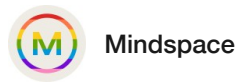
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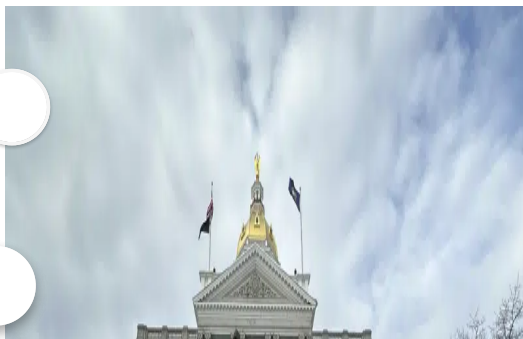
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Many transgender health bills came from a handful of far-right interest groups, AP finds

By JEFF McMILLAN, KAVISH HARJAI and KIMBERLEE KRUESI May 20, 2023

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Aaron and Lacey Jennen’s roots in Arkansas run deep. They’ve spent their entire lives there, attended the flagship state university, and are raising a family. So they’re heartbroken at the prospect of perhaps having to move to one of an ever-dwindling number of states where gender-affirming health care for their transgender teenage daughter, Sabrina, is not threatened.

“We were like, ‘OK, if we can just get Sabrina to 18 ... we can put all this horrible stuff behind us,’” Aaron Jennen said, “and



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anti-trans

Arkansas and across the country.”

AP To...

At least 17 states have enacted laws restricting or banning gender-affirming care for transgender minors, though judges have temporarily blocked their enforcement in some, including Arkansas. An Associated Press analysis found that often those bills sprang not from grassroots or



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conspirators

Many of the proposals, as introduced or passed, are identical or very similar to some model legislation, the AP found. Those ready-made bills have been used in statehouses for decades, often with criticisms of carpetbagging by out-of-state interests. In the case of restrictions on gender-affirming care for youths, they allow a handful of far-right groups to spread a false narrative based on distorted science, critics say.

MORE ON TRANSGENDER LEGISLATION:

- Meet the influential new player on transgender health bills
- Transgender health: Comparing model bills to real proposals



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consistent

our state,” said Aaron Jennen. “For whatever reason, they have the ear of legislatures in states like Arkansas, and the legislators will generally defer to and only listen to those individuals.”

The AP obtained the texts of more than 130 bills in 40 state legislatures from [Plural](#), a public policy software company, and analyzed them for similarities to model bills peddled by the conservative groups [Do No Harm](#), which also criticizes efforts to diversify staffing in medicine, and the Family Research Council, which has long been involved in abortion restrictions.

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One of the [clearest examples is in Montana](#), where nearly all the language in at least one bill can be found in [Do No Harm's model](#). Publicly available emails from December show the Republican sponsor, Sen. John Fuller, tweaked the model before introducing it weeks later. Democrats criticized his efforts.

“This is not a Montana issue; it is an issue pushed by well-funded national groups,” Democratic Sen.

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“Someone mentioned this is not a Montana solution. And I can tell you that I won my election on this issue,” said Republican Sen. Barry Usher, who ran unopposed in the general election after winning his contested primary.

The Montana bill passed in March with much of Do No Harm’s model language intact and



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Do No Harm's model and the [2021 Arkansas bill](#) endorsed as a model by the Family Research Council also have many similarities, including the assertion — [rebutted by major medical organizations](#) — that the risks of gender-affirming care outweigh its benefits.

Republicans' recent focus on legislation to restrict aspects of transgender life is largely a strategy of [using social "wedge issues"](#) — in the past, abortion or same-sex marriage — to motivate their voting base, political observers

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... are found

among
Republicans, but
not Democrats, for
restrictions on
medical care for
gender transitions.

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“These
organizations are
not introducing
this model
legislation to make
legislators’ jobs
easier, to support
kids in their
constituencies.
They’re introducing
this model
legislation to gain



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Greenwich

analyst who monitors anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric for Political Research Associates, a liberal think tank.

Such bills often distort valid science that supports gender-affirming care for youths, said Dr. Jack Drescher, a psychiatry professor at Columbia University who edited the section about gender dysphoria in the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual. Do No Harm cites the manual in its model bill.

"These bills are not at all interested in patient care," Drescher said.

"These bills are designed to inflame."

It's problematic "any time policymakers are



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different
rest of the
community or that
relies upon studies
without having that
expertise,” said
Marty P. Jordan, an
assistant professor
of political science
at Michigan State
University. “It’s
problematic for the
individuals that the
legislation could
impact. It’s
problematic for the
larger public, and
problematic for
democracy writ
large.”

Kent Syler, a
political science
professor at Middle
Tennessee State
University, said: “If
it’s a good bill, no
one should be shy
about where they
got it because
that’s the federal
system working
correctly.”

Do No Harm
launched last year
with an initial
critical focus on the
role of race in
medical education
and hiring, and the



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states. People

have testified in
statehouses around
the U.S.

When asked about
Do No Harm’s
legislative activity,
founder and chair
Dr. Stanley
Goldfarb
responded in an
email: “Do No
Harm works to
protect children
from extreme
gender ideology
through original
research, coalition-
building,
testimonials from
parents and
patients who’ve
lived through
deeply troubling
experiences, and
advocacy for the
rigorous, apolitical
study of gender
dysphoria.”

The Family
Research Council,
an advocacy group
that opposes
abortion and
LGBTQ+ rights, has
been behind what it
calls the Save
Adolescents from
Experimentation



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Transgender transition

A leader of the Family Research Council declined to directly answer several questions about its model bill, including where it had been used and which legislators it had worked with, but said, "What should be an issue debated in the scientific community now has to be dealt with through legislation."

"The SAFE Act gives minors a chance to experience development before imposing lifelong chemical and surgical procedures that increasingly show evidence of psychological and physiological harm and completed suicide after the transition,"

Jennifer Bauwens, the organization's director of family



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July — continues to receive gender-affirming health care while her family’s suit winds through the courts.

“For these outside groups to carry more weight than the people these legislators were elected to represent is very upsetting,” Aaron Jennen said. “They didn’t listen to us before, but now they have to listen to us because we filed a lawsuit and went to court.”

—

Contributing to this report were Associated Press journalists around the country, including Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas; Amy Beth Hanson in Helena, Montana; and Michael Goldberg and Emily Wagster Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi.

—

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