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A Grandfather's Perspective on Anti-family States With Anti-transgender Laws

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By Robert Pokorski

My responsibilities as a parent were no different from those of people who first walked the earth: keep my children safe, provide them with food, clothing, shelter, and a good

education, and set them on a path to a long, healthy, and happy life. These innate, universal principles are shared by all parents, or so I thought.

Legislators in some conservative states display a shocking disregard for these fundamental tenets of life by seeking to eradicate the rights of parents who have transgender children. [Anti-transgender bills](#) have been introduced or enacted in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming.[1] What I find especially offensive is the hypocrisy of political leaders who use the pretext of “[protecting children](#)”[2] and “[parents' rights](#),”[3] to conceal their [true agenda—win votes in an electorate whose support may be wavering](#),[4]—while turning a blind eye to data showing that, depending on the metric, their states are consistently ranked among [the worst places in America to raise a family](#).[5]

For example, states that have introduced or enacted anti-transgender laws are among the most dangerous places for children in the United States. They have the [highest rates of Infant](#)[6] and [child mortality](#),[7] [firearm deaths in children](#),[8] [suicide in adolescents](#),[9] and [child sex abuse](#).[10] Most rank near the bottom of the list for [children's health](#)[11]·[12] and [dental care](#).[13] It gets worse. These same states generally have the [highest rates of child poverty](#),[14] [food insecurity](#),[15] [childhood obesity](#),[16] and [teenage pregnancy](#),[17] the [lowest-performing schools for young children](#),[18] the [least access to care for children with mental illness](#)[19] and [autism](#),[20]and [the lowest ranking for overall child well-being](#).[21] Children who are born and raised in many of these states can look forward to [the lowest life expectancy in the country](#).[22]

Instead of legislative action to address these rampant, decades-long inequities, politicians in these states simply change the narrative. Families, parents, and children aren't threatened by some of the nation's highest rates of early childhood mortality, systemic poverty, firearm deaths and sex abuse, substandard health care, and woefully inadequate public schools. Rather, the threat to the well-being of society is transgenderism, and the remedy is clear: prevent parents of transgender children from deciding what's best for their families.

Arkansas is a poster child for intentional misdirection by anti-transgender politicians. [It has the country's highest rate of child sex abuse—more than three times the national](#)

rate.[23] Perpetrators of child sex abuse nationwide are family members, family friends, coaches, teachers, clergy, babysitters, and other acquaintances, but almost never strangers, and certainly not transgender strangers using the bathroom. Yet there was a stampede by the state Senate to introduce a bill[24] (which was later amended because it was considered unenforceable[25]) that would have criminalized “use of an opposite sex bathroom in the presence of a minor.” This type of flagrantly anti-transgender legislation may garner support among some voters, but it tramples on the rights of other parents who want to decide what’s best for their children. Worse still, the law would do absolutely nothing to reduce the shamefully high rate of child sex abuse in the state.

As I learned throughout life, there is no responsibility more important than protecting your family. Parents and their transgender children are real people, not political pawns. Lawmakers in anti-family states who genuinely want to help families, parents, and children would be advised to enact legislation that improves the lives of their citizens, and leave decisions about transgender issues to parents and health care providers.

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