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California Youth & Behavioral Health Advocates: Anti-Trans Rhetoric Harms Youth Mental Health

Sacramento, CA – Leading advocates for the behavioral health safety net and youth behavioral health released a joint statement of concern after Governor Gavin Newsom appeared to align himself with anti-transgender rhetoric in his podcast interview with an outspoken opponent of LGBTQ+ rights and transgender affirming care.

“As health and LGBTQ advocates who have been bolstered by Governor Newsom’s past support, we feel profoundly betrayed and outraged by his remarks on the podcast with Charlie Kirk regarding TGI youth participating in sports,” said **Dannie Ceseña, Director of the [California LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network](#)**. “Trust has been shattered between the TGI community, including the parents of TGI youth, and Governor Newsom. This betrayal is irreparable. It is utterly disingenuous for him to claim to be an ally while giving credibility to a right-wing, anti-trans provocateur like Charlie Kirk on his podcast,” said Ceseña.

“At a time when federal attacks on the transgender, gender-diverse, and intersex (TGI) community are increasing, we should be able to rely on our California elected officials to protect the vulnerable communities - especially when they’ve touted themselves as a champion for over decade,” said **Amanda McAllister-Wallner, interim executive director of [Health Access California](#)**. “Unfortunately, our top state official, Governor Gavin Newsom, appears to be abandoning our community just when we need him most.”

Michelle Doty Cabrera, Executive Director of the [County Behavioral Health Directors Association](#), said: “County behavioral health directors providing Medi-Cal mental health and substance use disorder treatment services to LGBTQ Californians across the lifespan

have seen first-hand the devastating effects of harmful political discourse on their wellbeing. Data from the [Trevor Project](#) showed a 700% surge in contacts with youth crisis lines the day following the November 2024 election and a 33% increase leading up to inauguration day, related to hateful speech and scapegoating of LGBTQ people by the Trump Administration. California's leaders must uphold our commitment to affirming the rights of transgender youth, not only in sports, but in our schools and health care as the lives of young people quite literally depend on it."

"Governor Newsom's comments shocked the conscience of a state that just recently declared that California is a state of refuge for trans youth seeking care hatefully banned in other states. The kind of intolerance we saw on display today directly results in the overrepresentation of transgender and LGBTQ+ youth in our behavioral health crisis system, as well as foster care and homelessness. As providers of mental health and substance use disorder care and housing for vulnerable youth, we stand by our state's commitment to equality for transgender youth," said **Adrienne Shilton, Vice President of Public Policy and Strategy with the [California Alliance for Child and Family Services](#)**.

"LGBTQ+ people experience deep health disparities because of pervasive biases and discrimination. We count on our Governor to stand up for us against bullies, not to invite and endorse derogatory and stigmatizing rhetoric from a notorious hate monger who weaponizes trans youths' health care for clicks. As the Governor well knows, California's young people are experiencing a mental health crisis. Comments like his cause deep pain and harm and erode our progress. The well-being of our children must transcend politics," said **Kiran Savage-Sangwan, Executive Director of the [California Pan-Ethnic Health Network](#)**.

"Children Now works toward a future where all children - including youth who identify as LGBTQ+ - can reach their full potential, without limitations. Aligning with those who openly practice hate speech and advocate to strip vital care from trans youth sends the wrong message to youth who are already experiencing trauma, discrimination, and fear. California's leaders must focus on advancing policies that lift up the most vulnerable youth, not use words that tear them down," said **Lishaun Francis, Senior Director, Behavioral Health for [Children Now](#)**.

"The mental health impacts of anti-transgender rhetoric are not theoretical—they're showing up in our crisis lines, counseling centers, and emergency rooms across California. When leaders amplify harmful narratives about transgender youth, it directly undermines the safety net we've worked so hard to build. Our commitment must be unwavering, because the data clearly shows that affirming care and supportive environments save lives, said **Robb Layne, Executive Director of the [California Association of Alcohol and Drug Program Executives](#)**.