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Families suing the state for threatening medical care for their transgender children

Mom: 'I feel like the weak are being attacked here'

BY: **BROOKE BAITINGER** - SEPTEMBER 16, 2022 7:00 AM



Credit: Alexander Grey/ Unsplash

Jade Ladue spent last weekend celebrating her son's 13th birthday with him. And despite the stereotype of his age, when children are said to turn into unruly teenagers – he's actually thriving, she says.

“He has so many hobbies. He loves sports, hanging out with friends, fishing, even going to school,” she said.

But she knows his experience coming of age could have been much worse. Because not all that long ago, it was.

Ladue’s son, to whom we’re referring as K.F., has lived as a transgender boy for nearly half of his young life. He came out when he was seven years old, she said.

Before then, he lived with gender dysphoria that gave him painful anxiety and night terrors that constantly robbed him of sleep. He ended up having a lot of trouble at school because of it, she said.

But that quickly turned around when he came out as transgender, she said.

“He was a different person,” she said. “He had this light about him. He was happy again.”

K.F. has been taking puberty blocking medication prescribed by his endocrinologist. It staves off the physical manifestations that accompany female puberty and spares him from having to endure his body developing in a manner inconsistent with who he is.

And he’s scheduled to start taking testosterone next year, Ladue said.

But over the last six months or so, K.F. and his family have watched, horrified, as his shot at living without the anxiety and night terrors of his past becomes less and less of a safe bet for his future.



📷 Credit: Sandy Millar/Unsplash

So, they’re suing Florida’s health care agency as it strips them of K.F.’s ability to access the very health care that has so dramatically improved his quality of life.

They are one of four plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the Florida Agency for Healthcare Administration’s (AHCA) new rule, which bans coverage for gender-affirming health care for transgender and non-binary Floridians who receive their health insurance through Medicaid. The rule could force as many as 9,000 transgender Medicaid beneficiaries to forego medical care that their doctors have prescribed as medically necessary treatment, according to advocates.

State’s most vulnerable

The rule targets some of the state's most vulnerable – people who live on low or fixed incomes, who are disabled, who are transgender and gender non-conforming. Just like K.F.'s family.

“I feel like the weak are being attacked here,” Ladue said. “It’s very upsetting. The most important thing to us right now is having that coverage [for gender-affirming care], because we can’t afford that cost out of pocket.”

Ladue works as a patient coordinator at a dental office. K.F.'s stepdad is disabled and can't work. He receives Social Security Disability Insurance and is a Medicare beneficiary. K.F. has four siblings, ages five to 16 years old.

“It’s hard,” Ladue said. “There’s this stereotype of people on Medicaid. ... It’s not like we’re sitting around trying to collect benefits. We’re doing the absolute most that we possibly can.”

A group of LGBTQ+ rights organizations, including the Southern Legal Counsel, Lambda Legal, the National Health Law Program, and the Florida Health Justice Project, filed the federal lawsuit against AHCA last week.



📷 Simone Chriss. Credit: Transgender Rights Initiative, Southern Legal Counsel

On Monday, the legal groups asked the court to block AHCA's ban on gender-affirming care from being enforced until there's a trial on the merits of the rule.

Simone Chriss, director of the Transgender Rights Initiative at Southern Legal Counsel, said the legal teams filed the motion for a preliminary injunction asking for emergency relief “because each and every day that passes with this rule,” – which went into effect Aug. 21 – “real people are being harmed” – just like K.F.

Barring treatment

Meanwhile, in a separate process, Florida's Board of Medicine is working to set a standard of care that prohibits doctors, like K.F.'s endocrinologist, from providing treatment for gender dysphoria.

K.F.'s constant anxiety and night terrors were a direct result of the gender dysphoria he experienced only five or six years ago, Ladue said. If Florida's Board of Medicine gets its way, doctors like K.F.'s endocrinologist could face serious consequences, including losing their

medical licenses. All for providing gender-affirming care for youths experiencing immense pain, the way they did for K.F.

For right now, K.F. has his faith and his community to fall back on, his mother said. His family goes to church together every weekend, where their peers have shown them nothing short of love, care, and support.

And he also has his affirming family behind him every step of the way.

K.F. told his mom he prays every day that he doesn't have to go through this, Ladue said.

“He even said: ‘I will do whatever I can so that I do not have to be who I used to be,’” she said.

“One of our things we said with moving down here years ago – we made a pact as a family that no matter what happens, we will make sure he does not have to go through that,” she said. “As a parent, I will do anything I can to help protect him and make sure he gets the care he needs.”

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Brooke is a Florida native and has covered the state's LGBTQ+ news and culture for three years. She studied journalism at the University of Florida. When she's not writing stories, she enjoys hanging out with her cats, riding horses or spending time outdoors.

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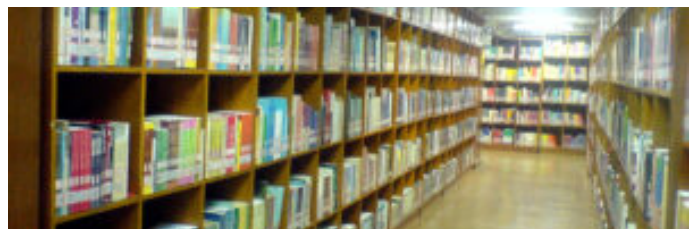
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