



Referendum 101

Messaging Guide

CONTEXT

SB 5599 updates the rules for providing emergency shelter to youth who are experiencing homelessness or fleeing dangerous home situations. Under current law, shelters must notify parents within 72 hours if a youth arrives at a licensed shelter or host home, unless there is a compelling reason not to, such as abuse or neglect. SB 5599 simply expands the 'compelling reasons' to include youth who are seeking lifesaving, gender-affirming or reproductive care. The intent is to give youth an avenue into safe shelter and allow Department of Children, Youth, and Families to conduct family reunification. If no one knows where the youth is, they cannot be reconnected with their family or another caring adult.

OPPOSITION

Opponents of SB 5599 are gathering signatures to put a referendum on the November ballot to repeal the law. They claim that it allows the government to take custody of any youth who shows up at a shelter, that the state will "hide our kids from us", and that the state will facilitate medical gender treatments without parental consent.

Our opposition refuses to understand that trans youth are often kicked out of their homes for being who they are, they attempt self harm at alarming rates, and make up a significant portion of the homeless youth population. They refuse to understand that this law is narrowly tailored to save these youth from the realities of homeless life - tent living, substance abuse, assault, or trafficking.

PERSUADABLES

Our persuadable audience knows very little about raising a trans child, but they understand the importance of the supervision of a caring adult. They don't immediately think children are fleeing unsafe home situations because they've been rejected for who they are, so we need to tell them stories about these realities and the help we are providing as a society. We need a campaign of trusted messengers from the community, and a narrative that our base can spread and repeat to the persuadables they know. After all, our own friends and families are our most trusted messengers. We do that through connecting over shared values, naming our opposition and their motives, and uniting over a collective action.



Narrative & Toplines:

To connect with our audience, it's important to tell a complete story that begins with a shared value, names a villain and their motivation, and points to our collective outcome.

- We all know that the best thing for a child is to be with a loving family that supports them. This law continues to empower social workers and people at shelters to reunite kids with their families.
- Our other priority is keeping kids safe. All of us want our kids to have a safe place to live, to be themselves, and to grow up healthy. This law will keep at-risk kids in shelters and protected from the dangers of living on the streets.
- A handful of politicians are stoking fears and lying about the law for their own political gain. They exploit some Washingtonians lack of familiarity with transgender kids so they can spread lies about what SB 5599 really does, all to distract from their own failures to deliver for our families.
- In reality, SB 5599 ensures kids who are seeking lifesaving health care can be safely housed, go to school, and pursue their dreams. Every child should have the freedom to thrive in a safe environment with adults who care for them.

Pivots

We must be careful to not simply refute the claims of the opposition. We need to have this conversation on our own terms, and immediately pivoting from their claim to our message is important.

When They Say:	We Say:
This law rebrands parents as abusers and hides kids from their parents.	Let's remember what this is really about: whether trans kids should be treated fairly across all areas of life, or whether they should be denied a safe home. If a child leaves a dangerous home environment for their own safety, the state should not force them to return back to that home or be out on the street. That's why we need this law.
SB 5599 gives custody of our kids to the government.	This is a lie. SB 5599 empowers social workers and shelter staff to reunite kids of all types with their loving families—that should always be the priority. Only when that's not possible does it ensure kids have a safe home with caring adults, rather than risking homelessness and the dangers that come with it.
Under this law, kids going through a "gender phase" can run away from home and permanently change their gender.	Many transgender youth grow up in a supportive home environment. But sometimes adults refuse to accept them for who they are and even put them in danger. When that's the case, those youth deserve to be connected to homes where they are supported and loved.

Words to Embrace and Replace

Embrace:	Replace:	Because:
<p>Our genders</p> <p>Genders</p>	<p>Gender</p>	<p>Pluralizing genders enables greater agreement with our worldview and helps activate more expansive attitudes towards our genders and transgender people.</p>
<p>Respect each other for who we are, transgender or not</p> <p>Support all young people to be their authentic selves and pursue their dreams</p> <p>Each one of us should have the freedom to be ourselves, no matter the color of our skin, how we worship, or our genders</p>	<p>Protect vulnerable transgender kids</p>	<p>Promoting the creation of a positive good (the freedom of self expression) is more effective than appeals to protect transgender young people from violence and discrimination. It generates support and trust from our base for transgender young people to know what is best for their own health and well-being.</p>
<p>Adults who provide loving, supportive, safe environments</p> <p>Certain politicians who stoke fear among parents</p> <p>Licensed shelters providing stable homes</p>	<p>Parents</p> <p>Politicians</p> <p>The Government</p>	<p>We should be careful about naming large swaths of people or entities, and always pair villains or heroes with what they are doing.</p> <p>Parents aren't always the heroes here, but every child should be cared for by a loving adult in their life.</p>

The **PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT** has a **compelling story to tell,**

rooted in collective action, shared responsibility, and community care.



The Communications Hub is a nonprofit communications program housed at Fuse Washington. Our mission is to build communications capacity in the progressive movement by training organizations on narrative and strategic communications.

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