National Center for Transgender Equality

Since its founding, NCLR has launched innovative programs and campaigns to address emerging issues. In 1993, NCLR became the first national legal organization to create a project for LGBTQ+ youth. NCLR's Youth Project focuses on keeping LGBTQ+ youth out of the foster care and juvenile justice systems by promoting policies that support them and their families and encourage family acceptance. It also created a specific Transgender Youth Project to provide legal information and support to trans youth and, in 2014, launched Born Perfect: The Campaign to End Conversion Therapy to prevent LGBTQ+ children and youth from being harmed by this dangerous practice. As of 2020, the campaign has helped pass laws banning conversion therapy in 20 states and more than 70 localities.

In 2001, NCLR began a Sports Project, which has represented LGBTQ+ athletes and coaches in discrimination cases and advocated for trans-inclusive policies in K–12, collegiate recreational, and professional sports. One of NCLR’s first trans youth clients was Jazz Jennings, who had to fight for her right to play on a girls’ recreational soccer team. On the K–12 level, NCLR has worked with 18 state athletic associations to develop policies that permit trans athletes to play school sports.

Other NCLR programs include its Family Protection Project, which provides resources and assistance to poor and low-income LGBTQ+ parents and couples, and its Immigration and Asylum Project, which gives direct legal services to LGBTQ+ immigrants, detainees, and asylum seekers. Since 1994, the project has represented nearly 500 LGBTQ+ asylum applicants.

Shannon P. Minter

See also: Discrimination; Health Care Access, Legal Issues; LGBTQ Movement, Trans Inclusion In/Exclusion From; Marriage, Divorce, and Parenting, Legal Issues; Youth and Teens, Legal Issues

Further Readings


Edmo v. Corizon, Inc., 935 F.3d 757, 769 (9th Cir. 2019).


The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) was founded in 2003 to be a voice for trans people in Washington, D.C. and around the country. NCTE has been the leading advocate for trans-inclusive federal policies and one of the main organizations working for trans rights on the state level. The group conducted the two largest studies of trans people in the United States and, in 2017, created a political affiliate to increase the importance of trans issues in electoral politics.

NCTE was founded by Mara Keisling and a diverse board of directors after years of activists being concerned about the dearth of trans voices in federal policymaking. The federal government often ignored and was sometimes hostile to trans people in developing policies. Deep frustrations also existed regarding what had been the “gay rights movement,” which was thought to be too slowly evolving into an LGBTQ movement. Lesbian and gay rights organizations, most of which had no trans staff members and did not include trans people as part of their mission statements, were viewed by policymakers and the public as speaking for trans people. The lack of a strong, professional trans voice in D.C. was viewed
by many trans people as inappropriate and insufficient, even though NCTE was preceded by organizations such as the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition (all-volunteer), GenderPAC (which focused on gender), and the Transgender Civil Rights Project of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (now the National LGBTQ Task Force).

NCTE’s theory of change has been that public policy can improve or harm trans people, and therefore trans people must have an assertive, Knowledgeable voice at every policymaking table. This is especially true at the federal level, where decisions are made through specific and established institutions and relationships. Early on, NCTE undertook successful work on state and local policies and in getting “gender identity” added to federal hate crimes legislation (which passed in 2009 as the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act). But its primary initial policy goals were transforming the gay rights movement into the LGBTQ rights movement and adding gender identity and expression language to the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which was then pending before Congress and covered only “sexual orientation.”

A significant step toward making the gay rights movement more inclusive occurred in 2007, when NCTE and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force led a coalition of more than 425 trans and LGBT groups known as United ENDA, which demanded that Congress not pass ENDA without gender identity protections. Although no version of ENDA was enacted, the United ENDA campaign was a turning point in LGBTQ activism, leading to the solidification of an LGBTQ movement fully committed to trans rights.

ENDA had been the legislative priority for lesbian and gay rights organizations since it was first introduced in 1993, but gender identity protections were not included until 2007. ENDA was replaced in 2015 with the Equality Act, which would ban discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity not just in employment but also in public accommodations, education, housing, and credit. The Equality Act has yet to become law as of 2020.

NCTE has grown increasingly involved in state advocacy, which has included pushing states to make it easier for trans people to change names and gender markers on identification documents (e.g., driver’s licenses and birth certificates) and to enact policies requiring health insurance companies and systems (such as Medicaid) to cover transition-related health care. NCTE maintains comprehensive resources on its website to assist people with navigating the complex state and local policies on ID documents, as well as navigating health care systems. NCTE has also supported efforts to pass state antidiscrimination laws and fought against state legislation that would allow discrimination against trans people. In 2016, NCTE played an instrumental role in condemning North Carolina’s law that required people to use public restrooms that matched the gender marker on their birth certificates. As a result of coalition work against it, the law was never fully implemented and the governor who championed it was not reelected.

During the Obama administration, NCTE focused on changing federal administrative policies, which led to more than 100 policy advancements for trans and LGBTQ people. Victories were achieved throughout the federal government, including on ID documents, housing (shelters), immigration, federal prisons, employment, education, health care, and military service. Another successful approach during the Obama administration was advocating for federal sex discrimination laws to be interpreted to include protections based on gender identity, while also pushing for explicit legal protections based on gender identity/expression.

During the Trump administration, NCTE was a leader in resisting federal policy rollbacks. In 2018, NCTE launched the “Won’t Be Erased” campaign in response to a leaked White House memo that outlined a strategy to overturn protections for trans people. To document and raise awareness of the anti-trans actions of the Trump administration, NCTE also catalogued each loss on its website in a project called “The Discrimination Administration” (https://transequality.org/the-discrimination-administration).

In 2008, NCTE worked with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to establish and conduct the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, which, with over 6,700 participants, was the largest study of the trans population at the time. Previously, advocates had to rely almost entirely on telling individuals’ stories of discrimination to try to persuade policymakers. In 2015, NCTE conducted a larger study, the United States Transgender Survey, which had nearly 28,000 participants. It is now the go-to source for data about trans people.
In 2017, in response to Trump’s election, NCTE created the National Center for Transgender Equality Action Fund (NCTEAF), an affiliated 501(c)(4) political organization, in order to expand governmental lobbying and participate in electoral politics more fully. In 2019, NCTEAF launched a project called “TransForm the White House,” in which Democratic presidential candidates gave video interviews about how they would support the trans community. In 2020, NCTEAF became the first national LGBTQ rights organization to endorse Joe Biden’s candidacy for president.

Mara Keisling and Lisa Mottet

See also Activism; Gender Identity Discrimination as Sex Discrimination; Nondiscrimination Laws, Federal, State, and Local; United States Transgender Survey (USTS)

Further Readings


NCLR

See National Center for Lesbian Rights.

NCTE

See National Center for Transgender Equality.

Neurodiversity

Multiple studies have found that the trans population contains greater neurodiversity than the cisgender (cis) population, with estimates of 5% to 15% of trans people also being autistic. These studies have focused primarily on the higher prevalence of one type of neurodivergence—autism. This higher prevalence indicates that autistic experience contributes to greater gender diversity or, alternately stated, that allistic (nonautistic) experience contributes to reduced gender diversity in the population. Neurodivergent trans people experience barriers to care among autism service and gender care providers, owing to lack of understanding regarding this intersectional experience. These barriers may be lowered through increased education about the trans autistic experience and by including trans autistic people in the development of research, training, and clinical practice guidelines. This entry describes the nature of neurodiversity and the spectrum of autism, differences in how people with autism and other forms of neurodiversity process information and how this shapes their experiences, the effects of societal responses to individuals who manifest neurodiversity, the intersection of autism and trans identities, and suggestions for how care providers, educators, and families can contribute to the care and support of trans autistic people.

Language and Definitions
A neurodiverse population includes people with a range of neurological experiences, just as a genderdiverse population includes a range of gender identities, such as agender, cisgender, binary trans, and nonbinary trans people. A neurodiverse population may include people whose cognitive and sensory experiences fall within a societally accepted norm (neurotypical) and those whose sensory and cognitive experiences fall outside the norm (neurodivergent). Examples of neurodivergence include Tourette’s syndrome, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, traumatic brain injuries, dementia, and synesthesia. Autistic people have been leaders in the neurodiversity rights movement, which recognizes neurodivergence as a diversity issue among minds, rather than as pathology. Many of the principles for supporting trans autistic people will also be applicable for supporting other forms of neurodivergence among trans people, including ADHD, Tourette’s syndrome, and intellectual disabilities.

Autistic Experience
Autism is a heterogeneous experience, consisting of a number of differences in sensory and executive functioning, each of which may be experienced to