



Statement on the Brutal Beating and Death of Nex Benedict

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention is outraged and heartbroken by the death of Nex Benedict, a 16-year-old non-binary student in Oklahoma, who died a day after sustaining brutal injuries at the hands of three other classmates during an assault in a bathroom of the Owasso High School. Their death is an alarming reminder of the real-world consequences that result from the American right's continued assault on the 2SLGBTQI+ community through hate speech and discriminatory legislation.

Nex and their family were members of the Choctaw Nation and held very open discussions about gender and identity in their household, encouraging Nex to be themselves. Nex is remembered as an "unfailingly kind" young person who was a straight-A student. Following their death, a number of Native American groups and leaders have spoken out against this incident. Among them was Chief Chuck Hoskin, Jr. of the Cherokee Nation who condemned Nex's brutal attack and death, offering support in the investigation from the Cherokee Nation Marshal Service in collaboration with the Owasso Police Department.

According to Benedict's own testimony before their death on 7 February 2024, they and another transgender student were followed into a bathroom by three older girls who were bullying the two for the way they dressed. In frustration, Benedict threw water on their tormentors, who then physically assaulted them on the ground until they "blacked out." According to reports, the girls were repeatedly beating Nex's head onto the hard bathroom floor. Though the altercation had to be broken up by students and staff, no further assistance was offered to Benedict beyond a brief examination by the school nurse, and no authorities were contacted. Instead, Benedict was suspended for two weeks for fighting.

Once they returned home from school, Benedict's mother learned of the fight and sought treatment for them at Bailey Medical Center. It was only during that visit that the Owasso Police Department was made aware of the fight at the school earlier in the day. The following day, Nex collapsed at home and was declared dead at the hospital.

In a preliminary statement, the Owasso Police Department said that Benedict did not die as a result of trauma. However, after much public backlash, it amended its statement to explain that the fight had not been ruled out as a contributing factor in Benedict's death.

Nex's mother informed The Independent that her child suffered more than a year of bullying at their school due to their identity as a gender-fluid transgender individual. The abuse began a few months after Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt signed a bill mandating that public school students use bathrooms corresponding to the sex specified on their birth certificates.

The Lemkin Institute wants to be clear that Nex's death is a consequence of being subjected to physical and emotional harm solely due to their identity.

The death of Nex Benedict is a horrific tragedy and a high crime. The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention is not surprised that it occurred in a state like Oklahoma. The state is a training ground for the American right's agenda. Religious zealots like State Superintendent Ryan Walters are actively dissolving the separation between church and state, thereby directly contributing to putting members of the transgender community in danger, since many anti-trans activists and politicians in the USA use Christian scripture to justify their assault on transgender identity.

In May 2022, Oklahoma SB 615 was passed into law requiring all public and charter schools in the state that serve pre-K through 12th-grade students to designate multiple occupancy restrooms at school for the exclusive use of either the male or the female sex, as determined by students' original birth certificates. Walters himself appointed the well-known anti-trans activist Chaya Raichik to the state's Department of Education's Library Media Advisory Committee. In his announcement of her appointment in January 2024, he praised her as being "on the front lines showing the world exactly what the radical left is all about — lowering standards, porn in schools, and pushing woke indoctrination on our kids." Raichik runs the social media account "Libs of TikTok" which frequently features anti-trans content and clips of public school teachers teaching inclusivity to stoke right-wing fervor. In fact, one of Nex Benedict's own teachers was targeted by the account in 2022 and forced to resign after backlash from the video.

Since Nex Benedict's death, Walters has only doubled down on his state's policies towards transgender and gender-fluid children, refusing to take responsibility for the climate of hate they have created.

The killing of Nex Benedict is a form of stochastic genocide, where systematic discrimination, violent speech, and incitement contribute to a social reality in which violence against transgender people is perceived as acceptable and even desirable. In the United States, anti-trans initiatives are also a direct assault on Native American cultures and identities, almost all of which recognize the existence of “two spirit” persons who do not conform to a strict gender binary. In this sense, the genocidal dynamics in the United States targeting trans people are an assault on transgender identity as well as Native American cultural norms.

The responsibility for Nex's death lies directly at the feet of those who perpetuate and enable anti-trans rhetoric and policies. The Oklahoma superintendent, Ryan Walters, along with others, like Chaya Raichik, who have promoted and supported the anti-trans agenda in Oklahoma schools, must be held legally accountable for their role in creating an environment where such tragedies occur.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention joins the 350 advocacy organizations, including Freedom Oklahoma, GLAAD, the Human Rights Campaign, and GLSEN, who have written an open letter calling for the immediate removal of Ryan Walters as state superintendent and for the opening of a US Department of Justice investigation into the Oklahoma Department of Education.

The Lemkin Institute further urges the US government and federal law enforcement to recognize the genocidal nature of the anti-trans movement and take appropriate measures to ensure the protection—legal and de facto—of gender-fluid and trans people in all 50 states of the country. It is imperative that the United States government actively condemns this case, pursues accountability, and works tirelessly to combat the growing systemic discrimination and violence faced by transgender people across the country.