



Statement in Support of Owasso High School Students

8 March 2024

In line with our call to stand in uncompromising solidarity with those under threat of genocide, and those fighting against the scourges of bigotry and hate, the Lemkin Institute praises, uplifts, and honors the courageous students of Owasso High School in Oklahoma for their stand against anti-trans hate.

Following the brutal killing of their classmate Nex Benedict, students at their school took a stand on Monday, refusing to take part in class, staging a walkout to honor the memory of their classmate. Nex, a non-binary student at the school, had endured over a year of bullying for their gender identity by other students, before their life was tragically taken on February 8th. On the day of the assault, no in-school resource officer responded to the violence.

Many students described the school as having a pervasive culture of bullying with little to no accountability. Numerous students at the school have expressed being “scared to death,” having received direct threats accompanied by derogatory language. 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.

Students and activists gathered outside the school carrying banners that read “You Are Loved” and “Protect Queer Kids.” Cassidy Brown, an Owasso graduate and organizer of the walkout in which dozens of students participated was quoted saying, “There is a community here in this city that does exist, and we see them, and they are loved.”

Violence targeting trans people, queer children, and the larger Queer community have been on the rise over the last few years as state legislatures have tailored legislation specifically targeting trans and non-binary children. It's disheartening that we find ourselves having to advocate for basic and fundamental rights like safety from bullying and violence.

We at the Lemkin Institute condemn the policies and rhetoric that has played a direct role in the death of Nex Benedict and the active persecution of trans and queer folks around the country. Anti-trans rhetoric

kills, and Nex's untimely passing serves as a stark illustration of this truth. This incident is not an isolated occurrence but rather emblematic of a broader pattern of violence and discrimination experienced by transgender individuals. It represents a form of stochastic genocide, wherein systemic discrimination and violence play a significant role in the loss of transgender lives. The Oklahoma superintendent, along with others who have promoted and supported anti-trans measures, must be held accountable for their role in creating an environment where such tragedies occur. The responsibility for Nex's death lies directly at the feet of those who perpetuate and enable such harmful rhetoric and policies.

Inspired by the moral clarity and drive for change the students of Owasso have displayed, the Lemkin Institute will continue to fight alongside those pushing for a compassionate world that champions the rights and liberties of all people.