

FALL 2025

BACK TO SCHOOL SHOULDN'T MEAN BACK TO FEAR

For many students, going back to school in the Fall brings a sense of routine, community, and promise. A new year can mean new friendships, new challenges, and opportunities to learn and grow. Yet for far too many LGBTQ+ youth, this same time of year brings anxiety and uncertainty.

In recent years, we have seen a surge in legislation across the country targeting LGBTQ+ students, including laws that restrict what teachers can say in classrooms, bans on books with LGBTQ+ themes, and dangerous policies that compel school officials to out students to their families — regardless of the risks that disclosure may pose for those young people at home.

In Iowa, we represented the Stevens family as clients in our legal challenge to the state's law that seeks to silence LGBTQ+ students, erase any recognition of LGBTQ+ people from public schools, and ban books with LGBTQ+ content.

Reverend Brigit Stevens and Joe Stevens say the law “sends a painful message to our family and countless others: that our existence, our love, and our identity are not acceptable... This law makes it infinitely harder to keep our children safe.” These aren't theoretical harms. As the parents of a nonbinary child, the Stevens' fight was deeply personal:

“We felt a responsibility to act on behalf of those who cannot.”

These types of laws transcend policy and result in personal harm. According to The Trevor Project's 2024 National Survey, 71% of LGBTQ+ youth say their mental health has been negatively impacted by recent legislation. Nearly half have seriously considered suicide. These are heartbreaking numbers - each represents a young person simply trying to survive - that serve as an imperative to challenge these laws.

In November 2023, Lambda Legal alongside the ACLU of Iowa and the law firm Jenner & Block filed suit to block SF 496. As Brigit and Joe Stevens put it: “When laws are unjust, someone must stand up and say, ‘This is not right.’”

When we protect LGBTQ+ students, we're not just defending rights. We're investing in a future that honors the dignity and humanity of every person. We're saying, loudly and clearly, that every student deserves to feel safe, seen, and valued in their schools.

Our challenge to Iowa's law has gone through a series of temporary blocks and appeals. For the latest developments, check out:
lambdalegal.org/case/iowa-safe-schools-v-reynolds/



Berry Stevens



LAMBDA LEGAL WILL RETURN TO THE SUPREME COURT

"I know how hurtful a law like this is to all kids like me who just want to play sports with their classmates, and I'm doing this for them. Trans kids deserve better."

- Becky Pepper-Jackson



Becky Pepper-Jackson and
Lambda Legal CEO Kevin Jennings

Since 2020, 27 states have introduced bans on transgender student athletes participating in public school sports. Some of these bans allow for invasive sex testing and physical exams that put all female student athletes at risk and open the door to harassment of students that don't fit an administrator's gender expectations.

This January Lambda Legal will return to the U.S. Supreme Court - this time to defend the rights of transgender students to participate in school sports. The Court will hear oral arguments in two key cases addressing this issue. The first, *West Virginia v. B.P.J.*, was brought by Lambda Legal and the ACLU on behalf of Becky Pepper-Jackson, a teenage track and field athlete from West Virginia. Thanks to Lambda Legal's victories in district and circuit court, Becky has been able to be on her school's team for three years without incident. As our CEO Kevin Jennings puts it, "This is a solution in search of a problem. Becky is the only out trans athlete in the state of West Virginia and there's been no problem with her being on her school team. These laws are political theater, pure and simple."

At the heart of this case is a simple, powerful message: *Let kids play*. Becky and all transgender student athletes deserve a chance to be on the team — just like cisgender students.

A Timeline of *B.P.J. v. West Virginia*

- **April 28, 2021:** Governor Jim Justice of West Virginia Signs HB 2393 into law. This bill bans transgender girls in West Virginia public schools from participating on the sports teams that align with their gender.
- **May 2021:** Lambda Legal files suit against the state of West Virginia representing Becky Pepper-Jackson, a transgender student who wanted to participate in her school's track and field events.
- **July 21, 2021:** U.S. District Court grants Lambda Legal motion for preliminary injunction, blocking implementation of HB 2393..
- **January 5, 2023:** U.S. District Court grants summary judgment to the State of West Virginia allowing the law to go into effect.
- **February 22, 2023:** U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit grants stay motion on District Court ruling pending appeal, allowing Becky to join her middle school track team.
- **March 13, 2023:** West Virginia files application with the United States Supreme Court to vacate the injunction entered by the Fourth Circuit.
- **June 3, 2025:** The Supreme Court granted certiorari in two federal court cases involving transgender youth challenging bans on their participation in local school and college sports, including *B.P.J. v. West Virginia State Board of Education*.

LEGAL LINGO



Certiorari - an order by which a higher court reviews a decision of a lower court. This is the term used when the Supreme Court decides to take up a case as part of its next term. You may also hear this term shortened to "cert" or "granting cert".

Vacate - to vacate means to cancel or set aside a previous court's decision in a case.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

This fight is about more than just access to sports, it's about the dignity, safety, and humanity of all young people. When laws single out transgender students for exclusion and scrutiny, they send a message that some kids don't belong. But Becky Pepper-Jackson and countless others are standing up to say otherwise. Together, with our partners and supporters, we're making it clear that no student should be sidelined for being who they are.





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BUILDING A LEGACY

MEET SANDY + JENNIFER

“Legacy Giving isn’t just for some of us – it’s for all of us”
– Jennifer Falco

For Sandy Mollett and Jennifer Falco, joining the Lambda Legal Guardian Society was not just an act of generosity, it was a continuation of a lifelong commitment to justice, equality, and community. The Guardian Society is the name for the group of donors who mention Lambda Legal in their will or bequests. They want future generations of LGBTQ+ people to inherit a world more just and equitable than the one they grew up in.

Reflecting on why they joined the Guardian Society, Sandy explains, “Our generation is aging, and we’re having those interesting, sometimes uncomfortable conversations about our estates. But legacy giving is not just for the wealthy or the older, it’s for everyone. Every dollar counts, and every contribution matters.” Jennifer echoes this sentiment with a note of pragmatism and warmth. “It’s so easy to do. You simply sign a document, and that’s it. You don’t have to worry about it. And yet, you’re helping sustain Lambda Legal who have been fighting for our rights for over 50 years.”

Their commitment comes at a particularly urgent time. Both Sandy and Jennifer note the escalating attacks on LGBTQ+ rights, particularly against transgender people, and the use of their community as political pawns. “None of us want to be used as pawns or distractions,” Sandy says. “...it requires all of us to play our part.” Jennifer adds, “Lambda Legal is



Jennifer and Sandy with their dog, Luke Skywalker

on the frontlines of that fight, in the courtroom and beyond. Supporting them through legacy giving is a way to ensure that fight continues, even after we’re gone.”

Sandy and Jennifer are living witnesses to milestones in LGBTQ+ rights, including marriage equality. “We never thought marriage equality would happen in our lifetime,” Jennifer says. “Now, we’re living proof of what it feels like to be legally recognized as married.”

This commitment is rooted in gratitude and a desire to give back. Sandy reflects on her own journey as a queer person, from her awkward teenage years to finding community and acceptance. “We want to leave the world a little better than we found it,” she says. “Lambda Legal has been there for us, and now we can help ensure they’ll be there for future generations.”

Legacy giving, they emphasize, is a tangible way to sustain that work. “When we fight, we win,” Sandy says, quoting a familiar refrain at Lambda Legal. “But we must fight to win, and that fight requires resources. Legacy giving helps create a sustainable mechanism so that our community can continue to thrive, no matter the challenges ahead.” Jennifer nods in agreement: **“You don’t have to be the activist in the streets. You don’t have to do everything. But this is one of the easiest ways to make a lasting impact.”**





LAMBDA LEGAL
**GUARDIAN
SOCIETY**

Hope, for Sandy and Jennifer, is intertwined with realism and resilience. They recognize the challenges facing the LGBTQ+ community yet remain optimistic because of the dedicated organizations like Lambda Legal who are working around the clock for justice. “I see youth, especially trans youth, standing tall even when they’re scared,” Sandy says. “And I see

our generation stepping up to ensure what we’ve achieved isn’t stripped away. That resilience gives me hope.” Jennifer adds, “It’s not about rainbows and unicorns—it’s about confidence that we have the tools to fight and the community to support us. Legacy giving is a critical part of that.”

Sandy concludes with a reflection on their shared values and hopes for the future. “We recognize our privilege, and we want everyone to have the same rights and protections we enjoy. This is about creating a world where people can simply live as they are, love who they love, and be recognized as full human beings. Legacy giving ensures that the fight continues, and that the world we leave behind is one where future generations can thrive.”

***When we
fight,
we win***

- Sandy



BACK TO SCHOOL



Lambda Legal is challenging discrimination in the court room and the court of public opinion.

Whether its laws restricting students’ ability to play sports or executive orders banning access to health care for transgender youth, our team is fearless defending the LGBTQ+ community.



Donate today and fuel our legal challenges on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community and everyone living with HIV.

Visit LambdaLegal.org/donate

