



Trans Justice Messaging Guidance

American Civil Liberties Union, Inc.
National Political Advocacy Department

The ACLU Advantage

The ACLU occupies a unique position in the electoral landscape by grounding non-partisan political action in a century-long commitment to civil rights and civil liberties. Our unique value-add lies in our non-partisan rigor and our ability to run data-driven voter education and organizing programs centered on foundational civil rights that drive voter turnout. Backed by a permanent national network of 50+ affiliates and an engaged base of over 4 million members, activists, and supporters, the ACLU executes voter contact campaigns that reach millions of voters across competitive districts in each election cycle.

Through our custom voter modeling framework, the ACLU maps precise civil liberties persuasion universes nationwide, including a core target of 9.6 million middle-partisanship voters who are movable on defining civil rights issues. A recent randomized controlled experiment measuring the ACLU's mail program demonstrated a voter turnout increase among our target audience, significantly outperforming the national benchmark for comparable programs.

An electoral brand test confirmed the ACLU's strength: 70% of all voters know the ACLU, and the ACLU has a +15 favorability among all voters. We are uniquely positioned to communicate to voters of color (+16 net positive), women (+14 net positive), pro-choice moderates (+18 net positive), and younger voters (+15 net positive). We are a trusted messenger capable of moving critical segments of the electorate.

The Problem and Opportunity

Transgender people are increasingly targeted by political actors who weaponize fear and erode civil rights to consolidate their own power. These attacks are reinforced by a regressive national discourse surrounding gender diversity, and attempts to define and constrain how people live, identify, and move through the world. Those attacking the trans community are also seeking to redefine who our public institutions recognize and serve.

The solution to these attacks is not only messaging but actively combating rampant discrimination against the transgender community. We know the public supports nondiscrimination protections for trans people and wants personal medical decisions to belong to individuals, families, and healthcare providers—not politicians.

Proposed Solutions

Our policy proposals focus on mitigating the harms of political attacks, ensuring access to basic needs, and securing protections for fair treatment.

1. Repeal or minimize the harm of laws that discriminate against, criminalize, or attempt to erase the existence of transgender people.
2. Ensure access to lifesaving gender-affirming healthcare, public spaces, and government ID documents for transgender people.
3. Secure statutory and constitutional protections for trans people so that they are treated fairly and enjoy the same rights and privileges as everyone else.

Hedging on Trans Rights is a Strategic Error

The reality is that policies around trans people are neither a dealbreaker nor top priority for most voters. In fact, they want to see candidates focusing on it less, not more.

For this reason, **hedging on trans rights in the face of attacks does not actually score a candidate points.** Where this issue becomes most problematic for a candidate is when opponents can use the issue to show they're not focused on the things most important to voters (which today means affordability and cost of living) or fighting for the needs of the average voter.

There is a political cost to caving on trans rights, *even if voters aren't all the way supportive of these policies yet.* The data show that candidates who may support trans rights but choose to distance, hedge, or cede ground on them score lower on key attributes, like authenticity and trustworthiness, while a more values-based message boosts a candidate's

Battleground voters broadly agree that transgender people shouldn't be discriminated against – but beyond that alignment is difficult. Fully two-thirds of battleground voters (68%) agree that *“transgender people are just like everyone else and deserve the same rights or at least that transgender people shouldn't be discriminated against.”*¹

In a March 2026 ACLU/GSG survey, respondents read descriptions of both Democrat and Republican candidates with different stances on this issue. Half read about a Democratic candidate who took a **“pro-civil liberties”** position: *“A Democrat who says the government has no place interfering in decisions about a child's medical care, transgender or not.”*

The other half read about a Democratic candidate who took an **“exclusionary”** position: *“A Democrat who says it's not fair to allow biological boys to play in girls' sports or use girls' bathrooms. But this is just a distraction from the issues voters really care about. We should be talking about prices, not pronouns.”*

Democratic Candidate Attributes²

Describes Well	Read pro-civil liberties position	Read exclusionary position	Diff.
Authentic	+14	+4	+10
Trustworthy	+8	+4	+4
Principled	+20	+16	+4
Will say whatever it takes to win	+18	+32	-14

¹ [ACLU-GSG Transgender Rights Interested Parties Memo, 2026](#)

² [ACLU-GSG Transgender Rights Interested Parties Memo, 2026](#)

Similarly, a pro-civil liberties Republican candidate³ was more likely to be seen as thoughtful (+18) and principled (+8), and less likely to be seen as weak (-12) or willing to say whatever it takes to win (-6) compared to one who took an “exclusionary” position.⁴

Republican Candidate Attributes⁵

Describes Well	Read <i>pro-civil liberties</i> position	Read <i>exclusionary</i> position	Diff.
Thoughtful	+8	-10	+18
Principled	+16	+8	+8
Weak	-28	-16	-12
Will say whatever it takes to win	+20	+26	-6

Message Recommendations

- Take an authentic, principled stance affirming the human dignity and equal rights of trans people, with a strong focus on addressing the challenges making life harder for everyday Americans.
- Keep focused on high-level values. No one should be discriminated against; our politicians should not be involved in our private medical decisions: *“Decisions about a child’s medical care, whether transgender or not, should be made by families and doctors, not politicians.”*
- Connect the dots for voters:
 - Integrate trans rights into a general message about strengthening our communities: *“Our country is stronger when everyone feels respected, whether transgender or not. Embracing our differences—without singling anyone out for unfair treatment—helps build stronger families, schools, and communities for all of us.”*
 - Include trans people in messaging about key issues: *“Some politicians are working to divide us to make it harder to fight for the things we all need: good jobs, affordable housing, great schools, and healthcare we can afford. I believe that every person in our community, including transgender people, deserves to be able to live a good life.”*

³ *Pro civil-liberties* Republican statement: “A Republican who says the government has no place stepping on a parents’ rights to make decisions about their children’s medical care.” ACLU/GSG March 2026 Research.

⁴ *Exclusionary* Republican statement: “A Republican who says everyone knows there are only two genders, male and female, and to pretend otherwise is ridiculous. My opponent wants boys to play sports and share locker rooms with little girls and will let children change genders without telling their parents.” ACLU/GSG Research.

⁵ [ACLU-GSG Transgender Rights Interested Parties Memo, 2026](#)

- Don't dismiss concerns, acknowledge them, affirm shared values, and (because trans issues are not widely nor deeply felt by most voters) redirect the conversation back to the issues that most people, including trans people, care about.
- Call out the politicians who are using this issue to score political points, but identify their motives instead of relying on labels like “extremist:” *“Some politicians are working to divide us....”*
- Authentically explain your rationale and values, without trying to change minds: Governors Spanberger and Sherrill leveraged their background as moms and their professional experience cracking down on child abusers to show they value keeping kids safe.
- We absolutely do not need to throw trans people and vulnerable kids under the bus to win. Governor Spanberger effectively withstood \$10 million in anti-trans attacks. There is no need to pre-emptively concede the narrative.