

Statement of Solidarity with Transgender Students in Singapore

1. We, the undersigned organisations, express our solidarity with Ashlee, the transgender student at Millennia Institute whose rights to privacy, health, safety and access to education were violated by her school. We are deeply concerned about the lack of institutional regulations or policies that acknowledge and protect the rights of transgender students in Singapore. The facts referred to in this statement were provided to us directly by Ashlee to the best of her recollection and knowledge. For reference, we provide a complete timeline of events from Ashlee's perspective at the end of this statement.

2. Transgender youths often face violence and discrimination at home and in schools because of their gender identities or expressions. In a joint submission to the United Nations (UN) for Singapore's third Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Sayoni and TransgenderSG documented many such incidents, including where educational institutions sought to prevent transgender students from transitioning or pursuing hormone replacement therapy (HRT) while at school. TransgenderSG's 2020 nationwide survey found that over three-quarters of students who were out as transgender in school reported negative experiences ranging from bullying to sexual assault. A third of trans students stated that they did not feel safe at school, and almost half felt they had no one at school they could turn to for help.

3. Despite having parental consent to medically transition, Ashlee was informed by her doctor in August 2020 that MOE needs him to consult and work with schools before referring any student for HRT. On 23 October 2020, Ashlee's school leaders and administrators met with her and her father to inform them that should Ashlee choose to receive hormone replacement therapy, it would have to be at a reduced dosage. They told Ashlee that she would be expelled if physical changes from the hormones made her no longer able to fit into the boys' uniform.

4. On 5 November 2020, Ashlee was pulled out of class and reprimanded for her hair length. After returning home, the school called her father to inform him that Ashlee was not to return to school until she cut her hair. The school declined her request for home-based learning. Ashlee did not return to school for the rest of the school year from 6 November 2020 to 27 November 2020. On 11 January 2021, the first day of Year 2, Ashlee turned up at school only to be called up by the school administration within an hour and thrown out of the school compound because her hair length did not comply with the boys' dress code.

5. On 15 January 2021, Ashlee posted on Reddit about her experiences¹. MOE responded by issuing a statement denying their alleged interference in her hormone replacement therapy or that of any student.² On 18 January 2021, the school met with Ashlee and informed her that they would not allow her to attend classroom lessons unless she complies with the hair and uniform requirements for male students, once again denying her right to education on the basis of her gender expression. An allowance was made for her to wear track pants and a polo shirt instead of the boys' uniform, on the condition she agreed to cut her hair.

6. We affirm that medical advice, in particular medical advice on hormone dosage levels, should be left to healthcare professionals. Schools should not interfere with a student's healthcare decisions and necessary medical treatments. In addition, schools should not punish - let alone threaten to expel - students for failing to adhere to gender stereotypes and binary gender roles, or invade their privacy by sharing their transgender identity without their consent.

7. Existing research extensively documents a higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among transgender individuals. HRT is a life-saving treatment that has been proven to significantly reduce this prevalence and improve the mental health and quality of life of many transgender persons with gender dysphoria.³ In Singapore, a 2016 study found that nearly half of transgender women have had suicidal thoughts.⁴ Millennia Institute's ultimatum for Ashlee to choose between receiving an education or receiving medically necessary treatment violates her basic human rights to self-determination, privacy, personal autonomy and bodily integrity, as well as her rights to education and the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

8. In 2019, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC),⁵ which Singapore has ratified since 1995, expressed concerns over the persisting discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) children in Singapore and recommended the State to adopt comprehensive strategies, including providing sensitivity training for teachers. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has since expressed their commitment to meeting the mental health needs of students,⁶ and implementing measures to combat bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression at educational institutions.⁷ It is thus profoundly troubling and disappointing that MOE's official statement on Ashlee's allegations refused to acknowledge her gender identity and chose to misgender her by using male pronouns.

¹ Reddit post:

https://www.reddit.com/r/SGExams/comments/kwqqdu/rant_transgender_discrimination_in_singapore/

² <https://www.facebook.com/moesingapore/posts/10160435896227004>

³ <https://whatwewknow.inequality.cornell.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-the-scholarly-research-say-about-the-well-being-of-transgender-people/>

⁴ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/survey-depression-prevalent-among-transgender-people>

⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations 2019 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/194/42/PDF/G1919442.pdf?OpenElement>

⁶ <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/parliamentary-replies/mental-health>

⁷ <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/parliamentary-replies/measures-to-combat-bullying-at-educational-institutions>

9. In response to the Ministry Of Education's denial of any involvement in withholding Ashlee's hormone replacement therapy, and their stated commitment to keeping students safe, we call upon the Ministry of Education and Institute of Mental Health to act on this commitment by working with LGBTIQ organisations to clarify and implement a uniform standard of care for transgender students and other LGBTIQ youths across all schools, in order to ensure safe and nurturing environments for all students regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sex characteristics.

10. We invite all transgender and other LGBTIQ students who have faced violence or discrimination in schools to share your stories with us by emailing TheQueerCoalitionSG@protonmail.com.

Signed by:

ACAVE
Aces Going Places
Bissu
Dear Straight People
Embrace Singapore
Equality in Education
Free Community Church
gayhealth.sg
Gender Collective
GLBT Voices Singapore
Heckin' Unicorn
IndignationSG
Inter-Uni LGBT Network
Jejaka
Kaleidoscope
Mates Gone Running (MGR Runners)
Minority Voices
My Queer Story SG
Nonbinary Singapore
Out in SG
Pelangi Pride Centre
Penawar
Pink Dot SG
Project X
Prout

Q Space
QUASA SG
Queer Friendly Chers
QueerNUS
Queer Singapore
Rainbow Parents SG
Ready4Repeal
SAFE
Sayoni
SGRainbow
Singapore LGBT Law
SKRRRT CENTRAL
tFreedom
The Bear Project
The Bi+ Collective Singapore
The Greenhouse
The Healing Circle SG
The Purple Alliance
TransBefrienders
TransgenderSG
TransNUS
Trevvy
True Singapore Love
Young Out Here

AWARE
ASEAN SOGIE Caucus

Allen Carr's Easyway (Singapore)
I-REVIVE SG

Asia Pacific Transgender Network
MARUAH
New Naratif
SG Climate Rally
soft/WALL/studs
Post-Museum

Xpointo Media
Replica Software

What Happened To Ashlee

A TIMELINE OF EVENTS

AUGUST 2020

- MOE allegedly informed doctor that schools must provide consent for students to start HRT

NOVEMBER 2020

- Questioned about long hair
- Not allowed back in school on the basis of hair length but home based learning provided in some cases
- Repeated pressure to cut hair in order to resume schooling

FEBRUARY-APRIL 2020

- Questioned about long hair by school teachers
- Doctors letter provided about gender dysphoria diagnosis
- First meeting of school admin with doctor and Ashlee

OCTOBER 2020

- School tells Ashlee to conform to dress code or be sent home
- Schools tell Ashlee that if she goes on HRT, it must be a reduced dosage or she'll be expelled

JANUARY 2021

- Sent home again on the basis of hair length
- Not allowed back in school on the basis of hair length
- Ashlee goes public with her experience
- MOE issues statement denying events of Aug 2020
- Meeting with school admin, where Ashlee is told she cannot attend school without conforming to male dress code

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