



# The Northeast Tennessee ORGANIZER

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## Trans Rights, Reproductive Rights, & Democracy

### The Right's Attack on Rights

This year has seen a barrage of over 500 bills introduced in state legislatures across the nation, all aimed at attacking trans and queer people. Meanwhile, the right wing is on a mission to enforce nationwide abortion bans, already successful in nearly two dozen states. Voting rights are also under siege, with racial gerrymandering and laws curbing early voting and mail-in ballots. In Georgia, offering water to voters in line is now illegal. Alabama is refusing to comply with a Supreme Court order regarding voting rights for Black citizens. The right's attack on what they misname "critical race theory" is really an attack on people's ability to learn the U.S. right's history of opposing democracy, from slavery to segregation, to anti-suffragism, to denying bodily autonomy.

This struggle for reproductive rights, transgender liberation, and democracy is absolutely crucial for everyone in the working class. Let's break it down:

### Unveiling the Attacks

The assault on bodily autonomy is tightly intertwined with the capitalist system. As Karina Garcia explains in "Women, Capitalism, and the Ongoing Attacks on Bodily Autonomy and Reproductive Rights":

**"It is not as a conspiracy for profits, but as a form of political rule based on disciplining and intimidating one section of poor and working people, distracting and confusing others, and finally winning over and satisfying other layers."**

This assault is spearheaded by reactionary elements in society, funded by the ruling class, and executed through governmental power. This includes leveraging the undemocratic Supreme Court and various levels of government, be it state, local, or federal.

It also includes state violence. Bans on abortion and trans rights enable the long arm of the police and the carceral state to intrude into the lives of everyday working people. As they introduce new methods of control, with alarming tactics like inspect-

ing children's bodies and demanding the reporting of menstrual cycles for sports participation, they lay the groundwork for further violations of personal freedom and expression.

The United States is "now in fascism's legal phase," according to Jason Stanley. Writing in *The Guardian*<sup>2</sup>, he says, "Fascist lies have begun to restructure institutions, notably electoral infrastructure and law."

This right-wing movement is well aware that their stance is in the minority. Therefore, their goal is to eliminate even the limited democratic avenues available to the working class. They understand that given the opportunity, working people will rally to uphold their rights.

### DSA's Role in the Struggle

Chapters and working groups within the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) are stepping up together to play a vital role in the fight for trans rights, reproductive rights, and democracy.

The most significant source of our power to defend and expand reproductive healthcare and trans rights is the building of a mass movement. This movement brings together diverse segments of the working class using tactics such as mass protests, civil disobedience, and labor and tenant action, along with working-class electeds ready to call out every injustice against bodily autonomy.

In 2022, YDSA, the youth wing of DSA, passed "For Abortion Rights, Bodily Autonomy, and Socialist Trans Liberation." Since then:

- In the first state to criminalize abortion after the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision, YDSA at University of Missouri won affordable Plan B on campus.
- YDSA at ETSU organized the "Can't Drag Us Down" drag show and story hour in protest of anti-trans bills prohibiting drag shows and gender-affirming care for trans youth, followed by a "No Hate In Our State Block Party" protest against anti-trans political commentator Michael Knowles speaking at ETSU.

- Wesleyan YDSA in Connecticut's pressure campaign won free emergency contraceptives for students and for the University to cover all abortion-related costs that students' insurance doesn't cover, including transportation.
- University of North Texas YDSA organized to improve access to hormone replacement treatment (HRT) care on campus; they won a commitment to training in transgender healthcare for employees of the on-campus health center and to consider transgender care experience in hiring.
- New York University (NYU) YDSA won free abortions and Mifepristone for all in-network students.
- University of Louisville YDSA won increased funding to the university's LGBTQ+ center.

This summer, the DSA national convention voted to, in coordination with YDSA, prepare for and launch a nationwide fighting campaign for reproductive rights and trans liberation and to defend abortion rights, trans people, and democracy.

Preparation for this campaign starts in Fall 2023, with a campaign launch in January 2024 and a national day of action in Spring 2024. DSA's National Political Committee will collaborate with chapters and elected officials across the United States to construct a coordinated campaign of ballot initiatives, legislative bills, and public pressure to advance bodily autonomy and defend democracy.

DSA's campaign will face the mounting attacks on reproductive rights and the ongoing discrimination against trans people head on. This includes but is not limited to highlighting and fighting discrimination in housing, at work, in healthcare, and in collective bargaining agreements that do not protect trans and reproductive healthcare.

**We commit ourselves and the socialist movement to the struggle against all barriers to liberation. Autonomy and freedom aren't just for a select few—they're the rights of cis women, trans**

people (non-binary and binary), and gender nonconforming individuals, who are all part of the working class. Their liberation and autonomy cannot be cleaved from socialist struggle.

Join our movement: 1) Visit [dsausa.org/](https://dsausa.org/) join to become a member, 2) attend our local chapter meetings to get involved with our work on the ground, 3) if you're a student, join YDSA at ETSU, too, for on-campus organizing!

*'Breaking the Chains* magazine, Vol 4, No 2 & reprinted online December 24, 2022 at <https://www.hampton-think.org/read/women-capitalism-and-the-ongoing-attack-against-bodily-autonomy-and-reproductive-rights>  
"America is now in fascism's legal phase," Jason Stanley, December 22, 2021, *The Guardian*.

## GET INVOLVED LOCALLY

Northeast TN DSA and YDSA at ETSU have regular meetings in Johnson City. Attend one to learn more & get involved!

### Northeast TN DSA

Meets the last Wednesday of every month at 6:30 pm. Next meeting is October 11th.

- Attend **online** by registering for the Zoom link at [ntdsa.org/meeting](https://ntdsa.org/meeting), or
- Attend **in person** at the Appalachian Liberation Library, 419 W Market St, Johnson City

Questions? Email [northeasttnds@gmail.com](mailto:northeasttnds@gmail.com).

### YDSA at ETSU

Meets every Wednesday at 8:00 pm. For location, email [ydsaetsu@gmail.com](mailto:ydsaetsu@gmail.com).

### Appalachian Liberation Library

Open Fridays from 7-9 pm at 419 W Market St, Johnson City. DSA-friendly spot with leftist literature & like-minded folks.



## WATCH THIS SPACE

Leftist TV/film recommendations

- Boots Riley's *I'm a Virgo* TV series (Amazon Prime)
- *Pride* (2014 film)

# Fighting Tennessee's Child Prison Nightmare: A Campaign Against Wilder

The state of Tennessee has been abusing Tennessee children at its Wilder "Youth Development Center" in Fayette County for decades. As revealed in the report "Designed to Fail" (2022) by Disability Rights Tennessee, the last of the state's "Youth Development Centers" in fact operates like a prison for the disproportionately Black youth funneled into state custody by our state's failed juvenile justice system. Denied educational opportunities, subjected to the arbitrary and illegal use of solitary confinement, and overprescribed psychotropic drugs as a means of compensating for understaffing and ill-conceived carceral policies, it's no wonder that youth interned at Wilder expressed despair, fatalism, and disproportionately high inclinations to suicidality when speaking with watchdog investigators.

The abuses perpetrated by the state at Wilder are of utmost importance to the queer community. In addition to the well known institutionalized racial injustice of carceral systems, which directly affects the queer community, queer children still disproportionately face problems with school systems and homelessness. This leaves queer children disproportionately vulnerable to juvenile justice systems in general. Queer children are held at Wilder under the state's custody at a time when Tennessee is actively attempting to criminalize and erase queer, and particularly trans, lives. Prison is never a safe place for queer inmates, but the Disability Rights Tennessee report has specifically noted that the children at Wilder face physical and sexual abuse.

The problem is, the state government's response to Disability Rights Tennessee's revelations has been to double down on its failed approaches. In an era when the right has its eyes on rolling back child labor law and throwing children back into the mines and mills, it likewise seeks to subject our youth to the worst aspects of the American carceral state. While those who control the purse strings have earmarked millions to double this child prison's holding capacity, a Joint Ad Hoc Committee on Juvenile Justice formed from among our state legislators last year has put forward a collection of bills that would, among other things, allow 16-year-olds who attempted to escape Wilder to be tried as adults for felony criminal escape and lower from 18 to 17 the minimum age at which the Commissioners of Children's Services and Corrections could deem Wilder youth "incorrigible" and transfer them to adult prisons without judicial review. Insufficient

or entirely absent have been the necessary investments in supporting Tennessee youth before they end up in state custody, providing youth and surrounding communities with community-based opportunities for justice and rehabilitation, and piloting step-down programs that would allow youth at Wilder to move out of Wilder's prison-like setting. What the state has on offer is not a solution for Tennessee youth, queer or otherwise.

Addressing the abuses at Wilder and building a better approach to juvenile justice will require a pressure campaign spanning the state of Tennessee. Please help us build it. Help us to protect these children and to start showing the Tennessee legislature that we won't accept their classist, racist, queerphobic abuse any longer. Together we can demand the abandonment of the bill (SBO608) that would authorize the administrative transfer of children to adult prisons without judicial review. We can demand the construction of off-ramps for the children at Wilder so that Wilder ceases serving as a pipeline to long-term imprisonment. Ultimately, we can fight for new ways of doing juvenile justice in which the abusive caging of children gives way to prevention and rehabilitation.

Join DSA and join our local chapter, Northeast Tennessee DSA, in building the campaign needed to improve the lives of our children. The more people who join us in acting, the more we can do and the faster it can be accomplished. There are a lot of problems in our state we need to address, but this is a great place for you to start. You don't need tons of experience to be valuable. Together we can work to end child prisons and usher in a future of true family-centered care.

**JOIN DSA!** Help build working class power, further democratic socialism in the United States, and fight to democratize our economy and society. As a DSA member, you can participate in a variety of ways, depending on your time, financial resources & interests. All are important. Visit [dsausa.org/join](https://dsausa.org/join) today to become a member.

The *Northeast Tennessee Organizer* is a publication of the Northeast Tennessee chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America. All labor is donated.