

JOURNALISM PROTECTION INITIATIVE

Safety & Security for Trans, Nonbinary & Gender-Expansive Journalists

A Guide for Newsroom Leaders

The Trans Journalists Association • July 16, 2025

US Press Freedom Series

The Journalism Protection Initiative at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism is commissioning a series of briefing papers from top experts to address emerging threats to press freedom in the United States and fill gaps in knowledge and understanding.

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Introduction

Trans, nonbinary, and gender-expansive communities face an ever-increasing range of restrictions and regulations, both from the federal government and a majority of U.S. states. News leaders and managers need to be aware about the risks their trans staff face working in this current environment and implement policies to mitigate those risks, which pose a danger to press freedom and media safety.

The new rules include policies regarding official identification documents and use of bathroom bans, and are often accompanied by hostile rhetoric about trans people's place in public life. Editors and news managers should also be aware of the broader environment that trans journalists/journalists with trans partners or children are operating in at the moment and be conscious of the additional stress they may be under.

Families that include trans people — whether the trans person is newsroom staff or a child or partner of journalists — are also at risk.

Understanding Risks to Trans and Gender-Expansive Staff

Identification

Trans journalists may be at higher risk in any situation that requires providing identity documents.

The federal government has issued guidance that restricts trans people from changing the gender marker on passports from the one assigned at birth; it has also banned the use of “X” as a gender marker. A [number of states have similar regulations](#) around state IDs, with at least one — Florida — potentially treating an amended ID as evidence of “fraud.”

It’s unclear how federal policy about gender might impact trans people traveling with a Real ID that does not reflect their gender assigned at birth.

For example:

- When confronted/requested by authorities, including police, customs, and others
- When traveling, especially internationally
- When appearance does not match assumptions about gender
- When documents list X as gender

Detention

Trans journalists may be at higher risk in any situation where they are detained/held.

- Depending on which gender they may be segregated with
- Depending on what facilities they may be made to use
- Depending on what clothing or other supplies they are given
- Depending on how they are searched, and by whom

Facilities

Trans journalists may be unable to legally use any bathroom in some states, or safely access facilities in some buildings even in states which do not have bathroom bans. (For example, the Capitol in D.C. and other federal buildings restrict bathroom usage to birth sex.) Even when trans people do abide by laws requiring them to use the bathroom consistent with their birth sex, rather than their current identification, they have faced harassment and legal penalties. The existence of any gender

identity-based bathroom restriction may make all facilities unsafe for trans people. Newsrooms should be [aware of restrictions](#) in the locations and states their trans staff may need to work in.

Health Care

A number of states have passed [laws restricting gender health care](#) for minors and young adults. Some states also restrict gender health care for adults on Medicaid. In addition, there are proposed federal restrictions on gender health care that could affect trans people who are dependent on the military health care system, Medicare, or Medicaid.

- Trans journalists may be unable to access gender health care if posted to some states
- Journalists with trans children may be unable to access gender health care for their children in some states
- Journalists with a trans partner may be unable to access gender health care for their partner in some states

Unintentional/Inadvertent Outing

Some trans journalists are not public about their trans identity. It's important to understand who may or may not be comfortable with information about their gender identity being made public, or being identifiable publicly.

Special attention should be given to trans journalists requesting change of previous bylines beyond standard policy; a past byline may in some cases make a private trans status public.

Online Harassment

Trans journalists face elevated levels of online harassment. Newsrooms should be vigilant to such abuse and ensure that trans employees are considered in newsroom-wide policies around harassment mitigation, identity protection, and online safety.

Mitigation Tactics

- Legislation and regulations affecting trans and gender-expansive people can change rapidly; for example, the Trump White House revoked the previous administration’s guidance on issuing passports with an “X” gender marker within a day of taking office. Newsrooms should track and be aware of changes that may affect their staff. In particular, they should be aware of state and municipal regulations concerning facility access, paying special attention to issues of criminal penalties and other legal considerations. There are resources available that actively track risks to trans communities. These include [Erin In The Morning](#) and [Movement Advancement Project](#).
- The challenges that trans journalists face have implications for press freedom and media safety, and there may be instances where risk management protocols and mitigations are required, such as when deploying a trans journalist to cover a protest where arrest or detention is possible. Other issues are best addressed through workplace policies.
- Newsrooms should proactively develop clearly written, accessible, and pre-emptive workplace policies regarding potential areas of conflict. They should take seriously the heightened risk to trans staff and involvement in the crafting of policy. They should also formulate broad policy guidelines to help govern their responses to unexpected developments. These could include policies covering:
 - Potential detention of trans staff
 - Risks to trans staff travel to certain states or certain locations, and staff prerogatives to decline such assignments
 - Staff’s loss of — or their family’s loss of — health care
 - Online harassment of staff
- Newsrooms should be aware of risks associated with requiring staff to disclose pronouns on professional sites; in general, they [should not](#) require such disclosures.
- Newsrooms should ensure they have adequate mental health support for trans staff and staff members who have trans family members.
- Newsrooms should develop policies around requests for changes in past bylines that are sensitive to the issues facing trans journalists.

- Newsrooms should also develop policies around the treatment — in particular the visual and name identification — of trans sources in stories that recognize the higher risks they may face if they are identified as trans.

WHEN IN DOUBT

Check in with resources such as the [TJA](#). The TJA maintains a [robust style guide](#) to help newsrooms cover trans communities and issues that affect them. It also has a [workplace guide](#) to best practices for trans employees and contractors.