

Family of Colorado trans kid targeted by harassment hoax speaks up

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Abstract

I'd like to introduce you to a 16 year old high school student who I'm going to refer to as "Jane Doe." I'm calling her "Jane" because, after an ex-gay organization orchestrated an international smear campaign against her, numerous individuals have stated that she should be beaten and killed. Jane recently moved to a small [...]

Article

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Jane recently moved to a small Colorado town with her two moms. Jane transitioned from male to female two years ago with the blessing of her therapist. In October 2011, Jane came out to her parents. "I think it was difficult for her. She had known for a long time, but she didn't know how to come out with it," said her mother. "When she came out, it was hard. You go for all these years calling her your son and then it changes; you have to get to know the new person she is."



Figure 1. Jane Doe, July 13, 2012

After Jane came out to her parents, she then began the process of transition. "It's not like one day you're a boy and then the next you're a girl, my daughter went through a process to become who she is. Over that summer, she fully transitioned and returned to school as my daughter instead of having to hide who she is."

When she went to her old school as herself, Jane flourished. When asked if she had experienced any bullying at the time she said, “Just some name calling.” Jane’s mother elaborated, “Before she transitioned, we would go to shopping and when she would try to use the male restroom, they would make rude comments.” I asked her if she meant that men in the restrooms would verbally abuse her daughter before she ever transitioned because she was perceived to be female even when trying to present as male. “She was scared to use the restroom. They made rude comments, language that she didn’t need to hear just because she was trying to go to the bathroom that she thought she had to be in.”

“Since she changed, she’s comfortable with life. She’s really feminine, but doesn’t do tons of makeup each day. She’s just a normal girl. If people see her on the streets, people don’t... didn’t know, you know? Before all of this stuff happened, none of this bothered anyone.”



Figure 2. Jane Doe

When Jane’s mother refers to the “stuff that happened,” what she means is that one of the nation’s most influential ex-gay organizations suggested to the international press that her daughter was predator. The Pacific Justice Institute (PJI), an ex-gay organization, needed someone to be their cautionary tale if they hoped to fight an effective battle to end protections for trans children in

California and apparently decided that Jane fit the bill.

In fact, PJI tipped their hand to their true purpose in the last paragraph of their initial press release targeting Jane:

Earlier this year, PJI led the opposition in California to AB 1266, the most sweeping legislation yet to assert transgender rights in schools. That law, which is set to take effect January 1, 2014, is currently being targeted by a citizen referendum drive. Californians who have not yet signed a petition should visit www.privacyforallstudents.com to get involved. PJI's Notice of Reasonable Expectation of Privacy is available in both California and nationwide versions, and can be accessed at www.pji.org.

Figure 3. pij

I thought I understood the sequence of events that lead to PJI issuing their initial press release. From what I understood, an adult filed a complaint with the school about Jane. The school investigated the allegations and found no evidence to support the claim that Jane was harassing people in the restrooms. I thought that when the adult learned that there was no evidence to support their claim, they then went to the PJI and the media but I was wrong.

I asked Jane's mother how she learned about the allegations concerning her daughter. What you are about to learn gives a context to the campaign against Jane that has, until now, been totally missing. As you read the following account, I want you to put yourself in this family's place. Imagine how this would have affected you and your family:

"My wife and I were visiting my sister who was in the hospital while my daughter was in school. The principal called to inform me that a newscaster was at the school and wanted to interview me about my daughter's 'bathroom rights' - this was the first I'd heard about any of this. From what I understand, the school didn't even know. From what I was told, some adults tried to hold a rally protesting my daughter in a town close to ours, but only a couple of people showed up, so the news crew went to the school and the school called me to say that the news crew was showing up to talk about my daughter.

I didn't want our daughter to be left there alone, so we headed to the school. I wasn't sure what was going on, but I knew they were coming for my daughter. I had no idea who started this, but we had to be there.

I know my daughter. She's a shy and timid person. It was upsetting. As a matter of fact, before we moved to this town, she was afraid that she would be bullied at school. She had a fear that if she went to this new school, something would happen and she wouldn't be safe.

I reassured her. I told her that everything was going to be fine and to not worry... We're going through a lot."

A media ambush is how the school, Jane and Jane's family learned about the "harassment" charges. Let's be clear about what this was: it's a classic media gotcha moment. Prior to this hostile media encounter, apparently no allegations had been made about Jane.

Days later, the Pacific Justice Institute issued a press release claiming that they represented the individuals who made the harassment complaint. The PJI statement asserted:

“This is a nightmare scenario for the teenage girls--some of them freshmen--and their parents at this school,” noted PJI staff attorney Matthew McReynolds, who sent the letter to Principal Brian Schipper and Superintendent Rhonda Vendetti. “This is exactly the kind of horror story we have been warning would accompany the push for radical transgender rights in schools, and it is the type of situation that LGBT activist have been insisting would not happen.”

PJI warned the school that they should not act to control the “free speech rights” of those who claimed that Jane was a predator:

“We’re not going to stand by and let 99.7% of our students lose their privacy and free speech rights just because .3% of the population are gender-confused,” stated Brad Dacus, the president of Pacific Justice Institute. “LGBT activists are sacrificing the safety and sanity of our schools to push an extreme political agenda. This battle is no longer confined to California or Colorado; it is spreading to every part of the nation. It is crucial that we act now to prevent a crippling blow to our constitutional freedoms.”

The PJI press release extolled their leadership role in the fight against equality for California trans school children as well as their leading role in the campaign targeting Jane. Jane was the one who was the first in her family to read PJI’s venomous words. Sadly, Jane learned firsthand the violent intent PJI’s campaign had incited:

My daughter was the one who learned about the Pacific Justice Institute. She saw it online. She was upset. It made her panic. She saw where their story had become international news and she saw what people were saying. It gave her anxiety attacks. She was upset about the whole thing. She kept asking me how people could do that to her. She saw all this negative stuff about her and she can’t understand how they could say those things when they don’t even know who she is as a person. They don’t know what this does to a kid.

The level of hate levied at Jane and her family is taking its toll. But, don’t take my word for it; listen to what Jane’s mom has to say about it:

For the record, the entire family is quite clear. Jane isn’t harming, attacking or harassing anyone.

“Jane is private about everything. She’s timid and shy and tends to be afraid to talk to people. That they’re saying that she’s going around harassing people... it’s just not true. The people who are doing these stories need to realize that the kid behind these stories has feelings and gets hurt.”

When the story about Jane broke, I couldn’t help but notice that conspicuously absent from the reports were any quotes by the school district, the high school, Jane or Jane’s parents. The reports only repeated PJI’s assertions. It seemed that no news outlet had bothered to fact check the claims made against this trans kid. So, I called the school’s Superintendent Rhonda Vendetti. I learned that the school did conduct an investigation and they discovered that the claims of harassment were false.

“We do have a transgender student at the high school, and she has been using the women’s restrooms. There has not been a situation. All the students of these parents who say they feel uncomfortable just about the fact that the student is allowed to go into the restrooms at the high school, into the

stalls - they don't believe that that's appropriate, so that's where it stems from. There has not been an incident of harassment, or anything that would cause any additional concern."

Shortly after Vendetti's statements came to light, several media sources took down their stories and/or recanted and apologized to Jane. After the results of the investigation proved PJI's claims to be false, PJI changed their story. Instead of claiming that Jane was doing something to harass people, they asserted that Jane's existence constituted harassment. The statement asserted that the mere presence of a transgender person is both "harassing" and "intimidating" to non-transgender (cisgender) people.

In light of this, Jane's mother wished to make a statement directly to the PJI:

"What you're doing isn't right. You say that you're a God-loving people but you've targeted my daughter - a kid - like this. You shouldn't do this to any kid. You should be ashamed. You're wrong for what you've done to my daughter."

She went on to say that when all of this is over, she just hopes that her daughter might be able to reclaim some of the life PJI and their supporters took from her daughter. "I hope that she'll be able to go back to having a normal life, being a normal kid, to be the person she's trying to be. I just want her to feel like she's not different than everyone else and that she's a beautiful person inside and out. She deserves to be happy and lead a normal life. She doesn't deserve to be treated this way."

Pacific Justice Institute & Trans Children

Having lost the Prop 8 battle, equality foes have found a new, easier target: transgender children.

The law protecting transgender children, which California Gov. Jerry Brown signed in August, says schools must treat transgender students as equal to cisgender students. A coalition of anti-LGBT groups calling itself "Privacy for All Students" has circulated 200,000 anti-trans petitions throughout California. Their goal is to collect 505,000 valid signatures by November 12, 2013. If they collect those signatures, it will stop the trans equality law from taking effect in January and put the civil rights of trans kids up for popular vote in November 2014.

The old Prop 8 cast of characters has organized as the coalition for the "Privacy for All Students." Care to take a guess who's one of the largest supporters of the coalition? Yup, you guessed it! It's the Pacific Justice Institute.

The obdurate behavior displayed by PJI and media outlets like Fox News who continue to report false information about Jane should remind us all that there's a reason California-Style trans protections for school children have existed - throughout the nation - for around a decade. Even in America's most conservative areas, these California-style protections are viewed as reasonable. For example, Houston, San Antonio, El Paso, Dallas and Ft. Worth Texas public school districts all have California-style policies protecting trans kids. Moreover, these policies have been in effect for years without incident.

However, organizations like PJI won't talk about that. What PJI will do is claim that if trans-equality policies for children go into effect, they will lead to government-sponsored X-rated scenes in all the

public schools:

In a fundraising letter PJI issued last week, they claim that their actions targeting Jane have sent the LGBT community scrambling in a “near-panic.” Recently, PJI gave \$10,000 to boost to the effort to collect signatures in California for repealing the law protecting trans school children. This signature collection effort was recently exposed for lying to people in order to trick them into supporting their war on trans children.

While PJI’s actions against Jane are widely condemned by everyone from GLAAD to HRC, it’s seems clear that PJI’s motive is to do whatever it takes to make it legal to discriminate against trans kids in California. If that means destroying the life that Jane and her family built in order to score some political points back in California, then they - and their supporters - seem eager to do it.

Over the weekend, Matthew McReynolds, staff attorney for PJI, asserted that Jane’s mere presence is harassing saying, “[It is] our position that a teenage boy’s presence into the bathroom for teenage girls is inherently harassing. We’ve heard some reports that he’s commented on what girls are wearing or their figure while in the bathroom. If you can imagine that scenario from the reference and framework of a teenage girl, I think that’s pretty harassing.”

I want you to reread what PJI believes to be their most damning allegation yet. Think about that. It appears that Mr. McReynolds would be shocked to learn that women talk to each other in the restroom about how we look. Or, perhaps the reality is that Mr. McReynolds already knows this and is hoping to inspire you to stop seeing Jane for who she is and instead view her as a sexual predator. Which talking point would best serve their goal of repealing the California law protecting trans kids from discrimination?

Even after inciting violent intent in the conservative community, PJI is apparently unwavering in their goal of fanning the flames of hate directed at Jane.

The fiction that the town of Florence supports PJI’s actions is just that: fiction. PJI wants you to believe that the the town of Florence, Colorado wants PJI to treat Jane in the way they have. PJI claims, “We’re not going to stand by and let 99.7% of our students lose their privacy and free speech rights just because .3% of the population are gender-confused.” However, the reality is that hateful people who stand with PJI are in the minority. The people of Florence don’t want PJI or their hate in their town.

“I’m horrified over how they’ve treated one of our own. We want them to stop disrupting the school with their bullying. We want them to take their hate and go back home,” said Sally Moondancer, mother of a daughter who attends Florence High School. In fact, Sally had several pointed things to say about this entire campaign against Jane:

Local business 3rd Dimension Signs wanted to express a very strong opinion about PJI’s behavior:

“I really find it very sad that any group that says it supposed to be ‘Defending Religious Freedom, Parental Rights, and other Civil Liberties’ is out preaching such hate and bigotry, in the name of equality. Before they start casting judgment on others they should really take a long hard look in the mirror and see who the real monster is here... Keep your hate and bigotry out of our community it’s not welcome here. ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male

and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ - Galatians 3:28”

Florence High School student Kayli Conway told news reporters, “They’re kind of making it a bigger deal than it should be. I know that they’re trying to tell her that she can’t use the female restroom and I think that’s kind of wrong because she’s trying to be a girl. [This is] a big time bully problem.”

And, of course, Florence High School Huskies support Jane:



Figure 4. Supportive school parents from the Florence, Colorado community.

A female student from Florence High School who wished to remain anonymous said “[PJI is] so pathetic. My mom asked me about this whole thing when she saw it on the news, and I told her. She even said they were being dramatic.”



Figure 5. Another female Florence High School student

In a printed letter to the editor in the town’s local paper, the Canon City Daily Record, a woman named Dara Hoffman-Fox wrote to say, “This is a local teenager whose life has been turned upside down by just a few people who fear what they do not know.” The letter went on to say that PJI’s story “has since been proven false and media outlets around the world are providing apologies for having printed [false accusations] without having the facts confirmed. Sadly, the damage is done.”

Additionally, the students of Florence High School have organized their own group to support Jane.

The level of hate the PJI has managed to inspire towards one trans kid and her family is both enormous and devastating. It is beyond reprehensible that the PJI has sacrificed the life this youth has known in the hope of scoring a few political points in their fight to overturn trans protections for California school children.

For her part, Jane said, "The lies being spread through the 'news' are just horrible. I want to be able to let people know I haven't done anything to harm any being and I am a human with feelings too. I just really hope from all of this comes good and allows more minds to become accepting and open."

A 2011 study of 6,450 trans people found that:

"A staggering 41% of respondents reported attempting suicide compared to 1.6% of the general population, with rates rising for those who were harassed/bullied in school (51%)... It is part of social and legal convention in the United States to discriminate against, ridicule, and abuse transgender and gender nonconforming people within foundational institutions such as the family, schools, the workplace and health care settings, every day. Instead of recognizing that the moral failure lies in society's unwillingness to embrace different gender identities and expressions, society blames transgender and gender non-conforming people for bringing discrimination and violence on themselves."

The American Psychiatric Association states that:

The APA joins other organizations, including the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association, in endorsing strong policy statements deploring the discrimination experienced by gender variant and transgender individuals and calling for laws to protect their civil rights.

The American Psychiatric Association:

- 1.) Supports laws that protect the civil rights of transgender and gender variant individuals.
- 2.) Urges the repeal of laws and policies that discriminate against transgender and gender variant people.
- 3.) Opposes all public and private discrimination against transgender and gender variant individuals in such areas as health care, employment, housing, public accommodation, education, and licensing.
- 4.) Declares that no burden of proof of such judgment, capacity, or reliability shall be placed upon these individuals greater than that imposed on any other persons.

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