



**Testimony for the New York City Council
Committee on Women & Gender Equity
Oversight – Gender Equity in NYC: Access, Resources, and Support for
Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming New Yorkers**

Delivered by Quadira Coles
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Good afternoon Council Member Rosenthal and Committee on Women and Gender Equity. Thank you for taking the time to hold this oversight hearing to hear recommendations, feedback and insight on access, resources, and support for transgender and gender non-conforming New Yorkers. My name is Quadira Coles and I am the Policy Manager at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE).

GGE is an intergenerational advocacy and youth development organization that is committed to the physical, psychological, social, and economic development of girls and young women. GGE is committed to challenging structural forces, including racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and economic inequality, which constrict the freedom, full expression, and rights of transgender and cisgender girls and young women of color, and gender non-conforming youth of color.

We are also proud members and leaders of a number of coalitions and joint campaigns that advance our work – pertinent to today’s hearing, the Dignity in Schools Campaign, the Sexuality Education Alliance of New York, and Communities United for Police Reform.

Our Recommendations

Girls for Gender Equity’s work centers safety and healing for cisgender and transgender girls and gender-non-conforming and non-binary youth of color, with an understanding that safety and healing cannot happen without appropriate investments in meeting their material needs. A significant part of our work has been shifting narratives and public conversations and bringing an inter-generational, anti-carceral feminist analysis into the discourse around gender justice.

Meaningful access, resources, and support for TGNC young people in New York includes the following:

- Comprehensive sexuality education with an emphasis on consent and school-based resources for survivors of gender-based violence;
- Ensuring the integrity of the City's school climate initiatives and accountability for school-based social work practice;
- Centering political conversations about safety in the principles of restorative justice and integrating healing justice into initiatives to end gender-based violence;
- Re-thinking police as first responders;
- Challenging the use of child welfare systems; and
- Resourcing community-driven and community-led transformative justice processes.

GGE offers two resources, our youth-driven Participatory Action Research project, *School Girls Deserve*, and comprehensive recommendations crafted through the City Council's *Young Women's Initiative*.

The School Girls Deserve

The School Girls Deserve (SGD) campaign is an intergenerational campaign that calls on the Department of Education (DOE), local government and communities to create schools that center racial and gender equity and foster supportive school climate. This campaign is the outgrowth of the *School Girls Deserve* report that includes the work of GGE organizers, youth development experts, and young people in contribution to a participatory action research (PAR) project focused on the disproportionate impact of gender and racially biased policies on cis and trans girls and gender nonconforming youth of color within the DOE. This report depicted the unique ways school pushout and exclusionary discipline disproportionately impacts girls and TGNC youth of color. SGD includes 45 recommendations and a visionary framework for NYC to improve policies, addressing gender-specific realities that young people experience rooted in a racial and gender justice lens.

Amongst the following recommendations are ways to address the experiences of TGNC youth of color:

- Investing in holistic curriculum and pedagogy that is culturally responsive, intersectional and feminist so that schools can become an affirming community for TGNC youth of color.
- Create resourceful and dignified schools by guaranteeing access to all gender bathrooms, increasing dignified access to menstrual materials and fully allocating owed funds to NYC public schools.
- Create safe and supportive learning environments through Title IX or in-school support for survivors of sexual violence, trained guidance counselors and social workers, increased School-Based Health Centers and School-Based

Mental Health programs and stronger implementation of the Dignity Act, TGNC Student Guidelines and Respect for All.

- Decriminalize learning environments by removing police and School Safety Agents from all NYC public schools.

School Girls Deserve focuses on school-based issues due in part to the fact that schools are critical environments for youth to develop positive social interactions and a sense of self and wellbeing. These recommendations represent a vision where TGNC youth of color attend affirming and safe schools that prioritize their success and intentionally set out to address issues that perpetuate school pushout.

The Young Women's Initiative

The Young Women's Initiative (YWI) and the *She Will Be* report sought to build a lasting blueprint for investing in the future of young women and girls in New York City over the long-term. YWI embraced an inclusive framework around gender beyond the binary, ensuring that transgender young women and gender-non-conforming youth were also centered in the work.

YWI issued the following overarching recommendations:

- Collect disaggregated data on sexuality and gender identity separately, to better understand the experiences of LGBT communities, distinguished from data collected about TGNC New Yorkers;
- Secure the rights of youth in foster care, juvenile detention and all other government-operated and/or -regulated youth facilities to access comprehensive, TGNC-inclusive health care, including culturally relevant sexual and reproductive health care and sexual health literacy;
- Conduct a meaningful review of current policies relating to the safe and appropriate housing of TGNC people in City detention facilities in collaboration with transgender people and advocates; and
- Require comprehensive sex education in New York City public schools every grade, every year, that is medically accurate, age-appropriate and inclusive of issues that young people regularly experience, such as consent, negotiation, LGB and TGNC experience, gender-based violence and sexual harassment. Any expansion of the current sex education mandate should include proper teacher training, appropriate funding and resources, and a comprehensive evaluation of its implementation.

Conclusion

GGE continues to champion the work that removes barriers in the lives of TGNC youth of color. We ask to be a resource for Council in upcoming efforts to address the issues laid out by advocates today and that the youth are centered in this work as well. Thank you for your time and attention to these issues.