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TRANS RIGHTS

Trans Protesters Have Been Arrested in Front of the Supreme Court



By Katja Vujić, a writer at The Cut covering culture, news, wellness, and style.

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Photo: Alexa B Wilkinson & Bailey Payne

Nine organizers from the Gender Liberation Movement, including the organization’s co-founder Raquel Willis, were arrested on Friday outside the Supreme Court. The demonstrators were protesting Wednesday’s *United States v. Skrmetti* decision, which was an expected but devastating blow to the movement for trans rights and bodily autonomy more broadly. In a 6-3 ruling, the Court determined that Tennessee’s SB 1 law, which prohibits

gender-affirming care for minors, blocking them from potentially lifesaving and medically commonplace treatments like hormone therapy, puberty blockers, and surgery, is constitutional. The law does not prohibit any of these treatments for cisgender children. After being detained for two hours, all nine organizers were released without charges, according to GLM co-founder Eliel Cruz.



Photo: Alexa B Wilkinson & Bailey Payne

“Gender-affirming care is sacred, powerful, and transformative. With this ruling in *U.S. v. Skrametti*, we see just how ignorant the Supreme Court is [about] the experiences of trans youth and their affirming families,” said Willis in a statement. “Everyone deserves the right to holistic health care, and trans youth are no different. We will continue to fight for their bodily autonomy, dignity, and self-determination just like previous generations. No court, no law, no government gave us our power, and none can take it away.”

Last year, the organization staged a sit-in at Capitol Hill to protest anti-trans bathroom bills. “Gender Liberation Movement is committed to supporting families and young people as they navigate the changing political landscape,” said Cruz. “We are committed to continuing to respond to the Trump administration, and the government’s escalating attacks on our communities, with defiance, as is in the legacy of LGBTQ+ movement advocacy.”



Photo: Alexa B Wilkinson & Bailey Payne

At Friday’s protest, nine activists took hormone-replacement-therapy drugs — some real and some symbolic — either via pills or injections. “It was important for us to do a sacred ritual of administering hormone-replacement therapy,” said Willis, speaking to the Cut after her release. “These folks are using their prescribed care as a part of this action because it’s important for us to understand that gender-affirming care is just like any other care that folks may need, if they have a condition like diabetes or if they may need fertility treatments. There’s a really inaccurate way that the media and folks who are not trans have been allowed to talk about our care and other our care.”

In a statement of reclamation that emphasized the difference between how trans people are targeted for the same treatments that cisgender people receive without any uproar, four activists also released pink and blue “gender reveal” smoke. After speeches from Willis, youth organizer Jae Douglas, and Hazel Heinzer, an affirming parent of trans children, a group of organizers peacefully blockaded the street and unfurled long banners in the colors of the trans flag.



Photo: Alexa B Wilkinson & Bailey Payne

“I am feeling a lot of exhilaration but definitely a lot of pride — go figure — in how we showed up today,” said Willis. “There’s just been so much silence around this care that has been green-lit to be banned in upwards of 27 states now, but we just want to remind folks that we always have people power on our side. And no matter what ruling comes down, or what bans people try to pass, we still have the right to exist and speak up.”

The organization will continue its work, Willis said, in direct actions as well as education around the importance of gender-affirming care — and the connection between attacks on trans rights and attacks on Medicaid and Medicare, funding cuts to HIV and AIDs initiatives, and abortion bans. “All of our bodily autonomy is on the line in this time, and we have to be more connected than ever to protect and defend ourselves and the people that we care for,” said Willis. This decision affects trans youth directly and devastatingly, but make no mistake — at the core of it is the idea that the federal government has the right to involve itself in private medical decisions made by any person, of any gender, in the country.

To be clear, the harm and violence of prohibiting gender-affirming care go beyond their political implications. Leading medical organizations including the Endocrine Society and the American Medical Association have released statements, backed by decades of research, reaffirming the medical necessity of gender-affirming care as well as the high risk of suicidal ideation for those who don’t receive it.

“Folks should double their support to families and organizations that support [trans youth], including Gender Liberation Movement, but also, particularly in this moment, the Campaign for Southern Equality’s Trans Youth Emergency Project, which offers grants for families who need to access gender-affirming care either farther in their state or in a different state, as well as Elevated Access, which provides trains and flights for folks who need access to abortion care or gender-affirming care in a different state,” said Cruz.

Of her arrest, Willis said, “I remind myself of our ancestors who faced criminalization just for being themselves, for speaking out. When I was in the back of that paddy wagon, I thought about the queen — the street queen — who essentially demanded that the crowd around her outside of the Stonewall Inn those decades ago *do something*,” referring to an unnamed demonstrator who took part in inciting the 1969 Stonewall riots. “This was the agenda.” What better way to honor the history of Pride Month than that?

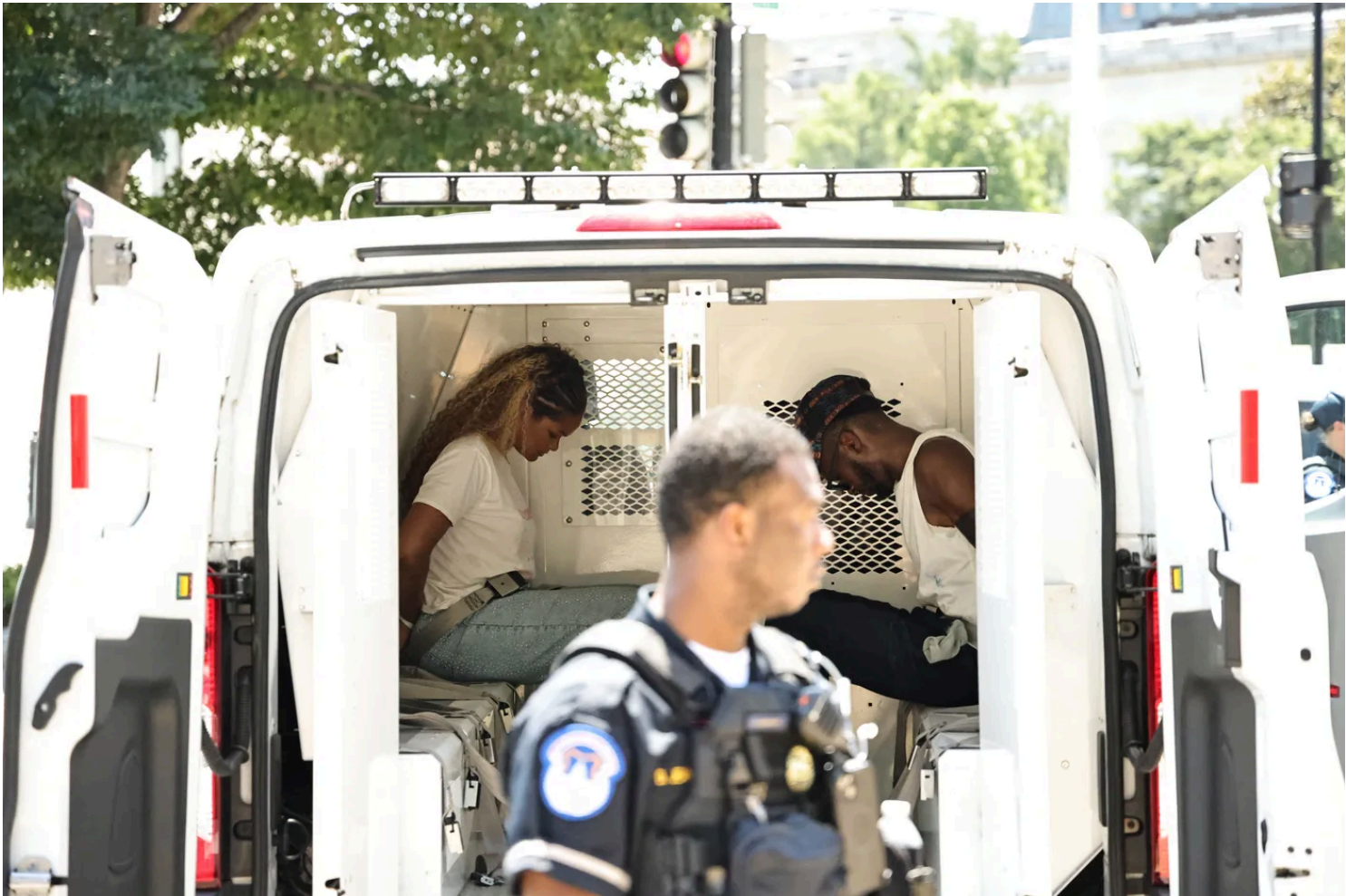


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