The Biology Department at Occidental College would like to state our strong opposition to the legal definition of gender as proposed by the Department of Health and Human Services. As reported in the New York Times, the DHHS is considering this statement: “Sex means a person’s status as male or female based on immutable biological traits identifiable by or before birth.” Further, the DHHS is reportedly considering this mandate: “The sex listed on a person’s birth certificate, as originally issued, shall constitute definitive proof of a person’s sex unless rebutted by reliable genetic evidence.” As biologists, we recognize the large body of scientific evidence that gender is not binary. We also endorse the following letter (see below), which has been signed by more than 2600 scientists to date. We would like other members of the Occidental College community, particularly our students, to know that we support the right of everyone to gender self-definition, and we will continue to respect such definitions.

Joseph Schulz, Chair of Biology
Gretchen North, Faculty Council President
Renee Baran
Elizabeth Braker
Shana Goffredi
Cheryl Okumura
Roberta Pollock
Dan Pondella
Gary Schindelman
Amber Stubler
Amanda Zellmer-McCormack

Transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming people #WontBeErased by pseudoscience

2018/10/26

Signed, 2617 scientists

As scientists, we are compelled to write to you, our elected representatives, about the current administration’s proposal to legally define gender as a binary condition determined at birth, based on genitalia, and with plans to clarify disputes using “genetic testing”.¹ This proposal is fundamentally inconsistent not only with science, but also with ethical practices, human rights, and basic dignity.²

The proposal is in no way “grounded in science” as the administration claims. The relationship between sex chromosomes, genitalia, and gender identity is complex, and not fully understood. There are no genetic tests that can unambiguously determine gender, or even sex. Furthermore, even if such tests existed, it would be unconscionable to use the pretext of science to enact policies that overrule the lived experience of people’s own gender identities.
The proposed policy seeks to erase the identities of millions of Americans who identify as transgender (individuals whose gender identification differs from their assigned sex at birth) or have intersex bodies (individuals with biologically atypical patterns of male and female traits). In transgender individuals, the existence and validity of a distinct gender identity is supported by a number of neuroanatomical studies. Though scientists are just beginning to understand the biological basis of gender identity, it is clear that many factors, known and unknown, mediate the complex links between identity, genes, and anatomy.

In intersex people, their genitalia, as well as their various secondary sexual characteristics, can differ from what clinicians would predict from their sex chromosomes. In fact, some people will live their entire lives without ever knowing that they are intersex. The proposed policy will force many intersex people to be legally classified in ways that erase their intersex status and identity, as well as lead to more medically unnecessary and risky surgeries at birth. Such non-consensual gender assignment and surgeries result in increased health risks in adulthood and violate intersex people’s right to self-determination.

 Millions of Americans identify as transgender or gender non-conforming, or have intersex bodies, and are at increased risk of physical and mental health disorders resulting from discrimination, fear for personal safety, and family and societal rejection. Multiple standards of health care for transgender and intersex people emphasize that recognizing an individual’s self-identified gender, not their external genitalia or chromosomes, is the best practice for providing evidence-based, effective, and lifesaving care. Our best available evidence shows that affirmation of gender identity is paramount to the survival, health, and livelihood of transgender and intersex people.

Given its scientific and ethical failings, we call upon the administration to withdraw this proposed policy. We also ask our elected representatives to oppose its implementation, as it would cause grave harm to transgender and intersex Americans and weaken the constitutional rights of all Americans. Transgender and intersex people deserve equal access to the rights, livelihoods, liberties, and dignity to which we are all entitled on the basis of our shared humanity.

View References

Signed,

Biologists, Geneticists, Psychologists, Anthropologists, Physicians, Neuroscientists, Social Scientists, Biochemists, Mental Health Service Providers, and other scientists in Solidarity

https://not-binary.org/statement/