



Socialist Forum

A  **Democratic Socialists of America** Publication

Run DSA Candidates for School Boards!

An argument in support of the "Run DSA Candidates for School Boards" amendment to the national electoral resolution.

by ROSE DUBOIS - **2023 DSA NATIONAL CONVENTION DISCUSSION**

The current political moment is incredibly dangerous for trans people. Right wing fear mongering about transness is nothing new, but the intensity and specificity with which they are targeting us is. **Far right figures are advocating what is tantamount to genocide**, and the Republican Party is in the process of codifying this into law. A significant number of states **have banned gender affirming healthcare for trans youths**, and some states are **moving towards trying to limit it for adults as well**. Florida in particular, now has numerous anti-trans laws on the books **that eliminate us from schools and criminalize trans people's use of the bathroom**. The recent events in Montana, where Republican state legislators **silenced a trans representative Zooey Zephyr** with intense vitriol, is equally illustrative. **People are having to flee their homes**, and like any situation involving those seeking to escape political persecution, this is far more difficult for working class people to do. It is not nearly an exaggeration to say they are only a few steps away from openly killing us—**in fact they already are**.

A major question for DSA is how we should be fighting against the far right, given the threat it represents to both our movement on the whole, and the safety of our individual trans members. Relatively speaking, we are a small organization, and we have little power compared to the Republicans pushing these policies, particularly in red states where anti-trans hate is most intense. Preventing a figure like Donald Trump or Ron DeSantis from being elected president is obviously important, but the degree to which we could move the needle is negligible. Most of DSA's impact and power lies at the local and (sometimes) state level, not the federal one. It only makes sense therefore, that we set an approach that uses that strength most effectively.

It is also highly unlikely that our own membership would be particularly enthusiastic about campaigning for a candidate such as Biden. Even if a motion to that effect could pass (it could not),

such a campaign would not galvanize our membership and do little to help us continue to strengthen DSA into being a mass party (which is and should be our top priority above all else). While it is absolutely important for us to be fighting against the far right, we need a strategy that is pragmatic and works for our organization. So in sum, our approach must: 1) weaken the far right's power to harm trans people; 2) take into account what we can realistically have an impact on, and; 3) allow us to spend our resources in a way that builds DSA. All three of these factors point to one thing: school boards.

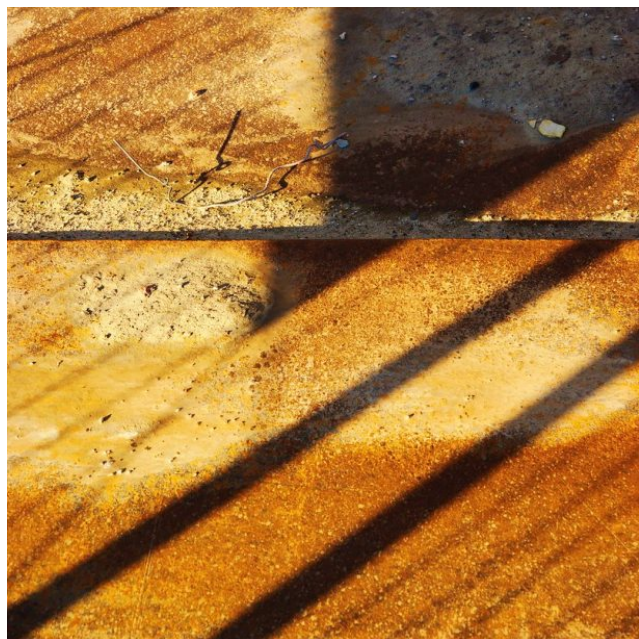
Outside of the state legislation being passed, a focus on school boards and other hyperlocal elections is one of the main ways the right is building strength. Through a combination of resentments about race, gender, Covid policies and vile conspiracies about teachers, the right is organizing to not only make the lives of trans youths miserable, but to gut our public school systems altogether. Such instances are not isolated to deep red areas either, they are happening everywhere—even New York City. Nipping anti-trans organizing around school boards in the bud is therefore important to prevent conservatives from bubbling into more cohesive forces in new areas, while halting further consolidation in others. If we are able to break them at the local level, it will be harder for them to gain momentum at the state and federal level. Trans kids are also a highly vulnerable population, and usually anti-trans organizing is directed at only one or two children in a particular school. Bearing the brunt of such intense targeted hatred is unimaginably difficult, especially for a child.

Unlike federal elections, school boards are also races we can have a clear impact in. They frequently receive far less attention than other elections (though there are certainly exceptions, particularly as some races get flooded with pro-charter school money), and in many areas, it's only the far right which is doing serious organizing around them. By concentrating our efforts on these races, we can have an outsized effect, and act as an important counter weight to the right. Contesting school board elections also has the benefit of putting us on the offensive, rather than merely defending what we already have. Simply holding protests every time a right gets taken away isn't a winning strategy in the long run. By electing socialists into those seats, we can set new, model policies protecting trans kids.

Focusing on schools also allows us to continue working on our long term goal of building an independent electoral apparatus, and links our electoral and labor efforts. Running candidates in school board elections is a good way for many chapters that currently lack electoral muscle to begin to develop the infrastructure and skills needed to run and win larger races. This also opens the possibility of engaging new kinds of voters, such as parents, who aren't currently always firmly a part of DSA's base of support. Public schools are a heavily unionized sector, allowing us to support teachers and fight against neoliberals in the pro-charter school movement.

For all of these reasons, I co-authored the resolution “Run DSA Candidates for School Boards” along with Shane Ruiz from East Bay DSA. At the request of the convention committee, this has since been changed into an amendment to the National Electoral resolution. If you are a delegate to the

national convention this summer, vote in favor of this amendment to ensure that DSA has a strategy to help protect trans people from the rise of anti-trans bigotry.



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About Rose DuBois

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