



## STATEMENT FROM JACK PETOCZ

Today, I led a planned and preapproved rally at Flagler Palm Coast High School in my home state of Florida in opposition to the homophobic and discriminatory legislation being pushed by Governor DeSantis and the Florida State Legislature. Over 500 students from my school joined thousands of other concerned youth statewide to demonstrate their constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and freedom to protest. Students waved pride flags and stood together, showing the politicians peddling bigotry that we will not be silenced. We made our plea to those actively targeting us, the same people who pledged to protect and empower all Floridians.

Although the school administration had initially approved the rally and expressed support for students' civil liberties, their demeanor and tone drastically shifted as the rally progressed. Administrators began confiscating pride flags and attempted to remove them from campus. As the leader of the rally and a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community, I encouraged my fellow students not to give in to the school's unconstitutional seizure of our pride flags, but instead to continue demonstrating our pride in a peaceful manner. After the rally, I was informed that I had been indefinitely suspended. School administrators allowed me to collect my things and then escorted me off-campus.

I am proud of who I am and I am proud of all of those protesting these regressive bills. We must let our politicians know that no matter how hard they try, they cannot suppress our identities or silence our voices. Gen-Z will not stand idly by as our rights are stripped from us. It is now up to you to decide which side of history you will be on, the side that empowers us or the side that seeks to erase us.

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