

Texas attorney general threatens legal action against schools that try to mitigate the spread of COVID and monkeypox

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As classes resume for the 2022-2023 school year, the Texas state government sent menacing letters to public school districts throughout the state last week threatening to prosecute any school officials who attempt to mitigate the spread of infectious diseases like COVID and monkeypox.

With the Democratic Party and the teachers' unions fully backing the murderous "let it rip" COVID policy of the Biden administration, the most far-right and fascist forces in the country, among them Texas governor Greg Abbott and his accomplices, feel they now have a free hand to carry out the most deranged and murderous provocations with impunity.

Texas attorney general Ken Paxton's letter cites an executive order signed by Abbott in July of last year. Among other provisions, the order stated: "No governmental entity, including a county, city, school district, and public health authority, and no government official may require any person to wear a face covering or to mandate that another person wear a face covering."

The order also mandated that no business may place restrictions on anyone related to COVID. The order further prevented any public or private entity receiving funds from the state to require a COVID vaccination, or to require documentation of vaccination status. Anyone not complying with the order is subject to a \$1,000 fine.

The order was originally in response to efforts by local officials in urban areas in Texas, the second most populous US state, to impose limited mitigation measures in defiance of the state government in the early stages of the pandemic. Lina Hidalgo, County Judge for Harris County, where Houston is located, had

insisted on limited mitigation efforts, for which she was targeted by right-wing extremists. (In Texas, a county judge is the elected chief executive of a county.)

Paxton's letter is undisguised in its adversarial hostility towards public schools in general. Citing Abbott's executive orders, Paxton warns against any efforts to challenge state policy in court, gloating that "all court orders purporting to stop the Governor's orders have been blocked." He states that Abbott's executive orders have "the full force and effect of law, and supersede local regulations." He ends the letter with the statement that "parents can send their children to public schools without worrying about new mask mandates."

In the face of the raging COVID-19 pandemic, now compounded with the unchecked spread of monkeypox, Paxton and Abbott are doing their best to ensure that more people, including children, will become infected.

At the same time that they work to ensure that infectious diseases spread unchecked in schools, the Texas state government is actively dismantling any infrastructure for tracking COVID infections, in line with national efforts by the Biden administration and Democratic and Republican state governments around the country. At this point it is impossible to determine how many children have been infected with COVID in Texas this year, as public schools are no longer required to report that information. There will be no new data for the 2022-2023 school year.

Paxton has already filed lawsuits against school districts that require students to wear masks. This includes districts serving students in Richardson, Round Rock, Galveston, Elgin, Spring, Sherman, Waco, and Paris.

As of August 25, 118 cases of monkeypox have been confirmed in Travis County, which contains the capital of Austin. As of August 26, 427 cases have been confirmed in Houston, while Dallas County has 476 cases.

Abbott and Paxton are fascistic figures, aligned with Trump's January 6 coup attempt, who vie with other right-wing extremists such as Florida's Ron Desantis for the national spotlight as they implement the most reactionary measures. These measures are aimed at dragging official discourse as far to the right as possible, while demonstrating to the financial oligarchy their readiness to carry out the most extreme measures, up to and including mass murder, in defense of corporate interests.

Among Abbott's other executive orders was his vicious July 7 executive order purporting to authorize state authorities to move undocumented migrants to the US-Mexico border, which openly defied federal law and the authority of the Biden administration.

The Texas Republicans have also seized on the Supreme Court's ruling abolishing the federal right to abortion in June to implement the most aggressive, brutal restrictions. In July, a group of Texas legislators went so far as to send a threatening letter to a law firm that planned to reimburse travel costs for employees who obtained abortions out of state, claiming that it would be illegal to do so.

Abbott was a featured speaker at the openly fascistic CPAC conference in August, which gave a standing ovation to an anti-Semitic, violent, authoritarian speech by Hungarian prime minister Victor Orban, who denounced "race-mixing" and declared that the "globalist" left could not be fought by "liberal means."

Paxton himself, who has been state Attorney General since 2015, has been under indictment for most of his time in office on state securities fraud charges. Paxton has also been accused of bribery and abuse of office by high-ranking members of the Attorney General's office.

But in the final analysis, Paxton's gloating, threatening, menacing letter would not have been possible without the full embrace by the Democratic Party and the teachers' unions of Trump's "let it rip" COVID policy, from Biden on down.

At the national level, the Biden administration has reneged on all of Biden's election promises to "follow

the science" with regard to the pandemic, instead doubling down on Trump's policy of allowing the virus to rampage unhindered through the population. The Texas Democrats have followed suit, dropping their token support for limited mitigation measures and supporting the murderous "back to school" drive. Meanwhile, the teachers' unions in Texas and throughout the country, far from fighting against the spread of COVID, have led the charge for "school reopening."

To date, no prominent Democrat or union official in Texas has made any public statements opposing Paxton's deranged letter.



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