

Hundreds protest, hold vigils across US for non-binary Oklahoma high school student who died after being beaten

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Protests and vigils were held across the country for Nex Benedict, a 16-year-old non-binary Oklahoma high school student who was beaten in a bathroom at Owasso High School and died the next day.

Hundreds protested in Los Angeles, where protesters could be heard chanting “Transphobia has got to go” and held up signs reading “protect trans kids” and “justice for Nex Benedict.”

Similar protests were held in San Diego, as well as at Owasso High School, where at least 40 students walked out on Monday in protest of the death and the pervasive culture of bullying with little accountability at the school.

Hundreds across the country attended vigils, including hundreds at an Oklahoma City vigil, as well as Seattle, Washington, 200 in Iowa City, Iowa and other cities.

Students speaking to NBC News noted that students felt it pointless to reach out to school administrators over bullying, as they would do nothing. Ally, a friend of Nex who also uses they/them pronouns, said, “even if something did happen, there’s no point in going to any kind of administration or teachers about it because absolutely nothing will be done,” and that, “I’ve seen it time and time again with my friends.”

Kane, another Owasso High School student and one of the organizers of the walkout, said, “To me, it doesn’t matter if Nex passed from a traumatic brain injury or if they passed from suicide. What matters is the fact that they died after getting bullied, and that is the story for so many other students. I’ve been close to ending it myself because of bullying. It’s not new for so many students.”

Only two far-right counter-protesters showed up, who

were blocked out by protesters.

Owasso police have released security footage from February 7, the day Nex was beaten at school. The police also released the content of 911 calls and bodycam footage from a police officer who interviewed Nex and their mother, Sue Benedict, the day before in the hospital.

In the 911 call Nex’s mother explained to the 911 operator that Nex was unresponsive and unable to look her in the eye, with their hands curling up. Ms. Benedict noted in the call that Nex had never experienced seizures before, which is what Nex’s symptoms at the time point to. A seizure is one of the symptoms of cerebral hemorrhage, i.e., brain bleeding, and other forms of fatal brain damage associated with head injuries, such as a concussion. Nex’s mother said on the call Nex had no history of seizures and no drug use beyond e-cigarettes and their anxiety prescription.

Footage of police interviewing Nex in the hospital after the incident was released by the Owasso Police Department on Friday.

In the footage Nex said they did not know the girls, saying that they and their friends were bullied by three girls for “the way that we dress.” Nex stated they blacked out after being thrown to the floor in the fight.

Nex’s mother stated she informed the school of the assault and questioned the officer, who made numerous excuses for the school, why administrators did not track down the girls who attacked Nex.

The officer, while saying the school “dropped the ball,” attempted to talk Nex and their mother out of pressing charges by pointing out that the girls could counter-charge.

The officer in question also said he knew the school

official who was supposed to call police for five years. He gave numerous excuses for the school official.

Owasso police say the investigation is ongoing and that the case will be forwarded to the FBI “for a complete and thorough review” which they claim they “work routinely together” with. There have also been calls for a federal investigation by numerous LGBTQ groups around the Democratic Party.

A police statement read that “preliminary information from the medical examiner’s office is that a complete autopsy was performed and indicated that the decedent did not die as a result of trauma. At this time, any further comments on the cause of death are currently pending until toxicology results and other ancillary testing results are received. The official autopsy report will be available at a later date.”

An affidavit from a search warrant performed previous to the above statement at the school read that the “Owasso Police Officers suspect foul play involved and need to initiate an in-depth investigation into the death of the decedent and believe any relevant information held by Owasso Public Schools is necessary to do so.”

Nex’s family has said they will perform their own independent investigation into their death.

The Oklahoma state government’s involvement in promoting anti-trans bigotry, and the fact that the official autopsy report hasn’t been released, raise serious questions about the validity of the police’s claim.

While it is not known at this time what Nex’s cause of death was, it should be kept in mind that police routinely lie. Departments across the country have been known to state an officer was without blame in a shooting, only to be exposed later, as was the case in the killing of Eddie Irizarry and numerous others. In the Uvalde, Texas school shooting, the initial response of the Texas government was to claim that the officers acted professionally, while it was later revealed they sat around for over an hour while the shooter picked off students in a classroom.

Exemplifying the reactionary role of the Republican Party, Republican state senator Tom Woods from eastern Oklahoma called LGBTQ+ people “filth” when asked about the death of Nex Benedict and its connection to anti-trans legislation. In his follow-up statement Woods claimed his constituents “don’t want

them.”

Woods said “We are a religious state. We are going to fight to keep that filth out of the state of Oklahoma, because we’re a Christian state. We’re a rural state. We want to lower taxes, and for people to live and work, and to go to the faith they choose.”

These attitudes are rampant in the Republican party as is shown at the recent Nazi-infested 2024 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC).

Chaya Raichik, a prominent Republican Party member who spoke at CPAC 2023, and who is on the the Oklahoma Department of Education’s Library Media Advisory Committee, responded to outrage over Nex’s death on her anti-LGBTQ “Libs of Tik Tok” account on Twitter/X. She spewed the same vitriol the account is known for, clumsily attempting to use the bodycam video interview of Nex and their mom in the hospital the day before they died, to falsify the facts surrounding Nex’s death in order to obscure her own and the Republican Party’s role.

The Democrats, for their part, have said very little following the initial short response from Biden’s Education Secretary Miguel Cardona. Vice President Kamala Harris and White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre made statements feigning sympathy without calling for any real political accountability.



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