

Some trans people turn to crowdfunding to leave Florida after anti-LGBTQ+ laws

By THALIA BEATYtoday

Trans people turn to crowdfunding to leave Florida

Dozens of trans people in Florida have turned to crowdfunding to help them leave the state after the passage of new legislation that targets LGBTQ+ people. This includes a law that curtails access to gender-affirming care for adults and bans it for minors. (June 2) (AP Video/Laura Bargfeld)

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ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Dozens of transgender people in Florida have turned to crowdfunding appeals to help them leave the state after the passage of new legislation that targets the LGBTQ+ community, including [a law](#) that curtails access to gender-affirming care for adults and bans it for minors.

For Sage Chelf, the decision to leave hardly felt like a choice, but she didn't have the funds to cover a move. The 30-year-old trans woman, who lives in the Orlando area, was nearly out of one medication when she found out the clinic that had been prescribing her hormone therapy was ending all treatment for trans patients.

"I don't want to go back to the person that I was forced to be at the time," Chelf said, of the years before she transitioned in 2021. "It was a very dark time in my life. I would rather just not be alive, I guess, then have to go back to living not trans."

Chelf was among dozens who made an appeal for donations online, saying they needed help to leave Florida in anticipation of or in reaction to a law that took effect May 17. In addition to banning gender-affirming care for [transgender minors](#), the law places new restrictions on adults seeking treatment.

The number of people seeking help online is a fraction of the 94,900 transgender adults estimated to live in Florida by the Williams Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law, which looked at state-level, population-based surveys. Many, if not most, will stay.

Not all trans people seek medical interventions. But for those who do, losing access to hormone therapy, or interrupting other care, can be devastating for their mental health. Over time, they can lose some of the sex characteristics generated by the hormones.

Chelf, who works as a leasing agent in Orlando, figured she would need \$2,500 to cover the cost of moving and finding a new job. She was stunned to raise more than \$3,000 online in less than two weeks.

"I was under the impression that no one's going to actually donate, people are going to think I'm just trying to like, get free money," she said.

People have given \$200,000 since January to fundraisers on GoFundMe started by trans people seeking to leave Florida, according to data from the platform. Jalen Drummond, GoFundMe's director of public

affairs, said the online fundraising platform saw a 39% increase from April to May in the number of fundraisers created to help trans people leave the state because of the changing laws.

That's still a pittance in terms of overall charitable giving, but it has a big impact for people like Chelf. Such mutual aid helps make up for the overall underfunding of nonprofits that serve the LGBTQ+ community.

A [recent study](#) found that those organizations received 0.13% of the \$426 billion in overall charitable giving in 2019, the most recent year that IRS data on donations to tax-exempt organizations was available.

One reason for that low figure is that many nonprofits that primarily serve the LGBTQ+ community are small, grassroots organizations that don't have a lot of fundraising capacity, said Una Osili, associate director for research and international programs at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. She's hopeful that the school's research can be a resource for both donors and nonprofits seeking additional funding.

The report does not look at funds exchanged directly between individuals. However, Elise Colomer-Cheadle, development director for Outright International, said it's likely that the most vulnerable in the LGBTQ+ community — older people, rural residents, immigrants and trans people — do not have their needs met.

“While their movement is the largest it's ever been historically in the last 55 years, it's still not big enough to serve all of the needs of this population against the backdrop of a very well-funded and very hateful opposition,” said Colomer-Cheadle, whose organization advocates for the human rights of LGBTQ+ people and populations around the world.

“There's a sense of: The opposition is out for blood and our lives are at stake,” she said. “And if we don't step up for ourselves, it's possible that nobody else will. It's a very, very scary time.”

The Campaign for Southern Equality, which advocates for the LGBTQ+ community, is providing direct grants of \$500 to the families of transgender minors across the South and to transgender adults in Florida. It is close to reaching its goal of raising \$250,000 in additional funds to distribute this year, said Jasmine Beach-Ferrara, the organization's executive director.

“We are having folks reach out out-of-the-blue, multiple times a week saying, ‘Hey, never connected with your organization before. I'm hosting a fundraiser for you tomorrow night thousands of miles from here. I'll send you the money.’ That's pretty incredible.” Beach-Ferrara said.

Chelf hopes to move to [Illinois](#) and move in with her girlfriend. The donations to her GoFundMe have restored her faith in humanity.

“I think everyone's aware of how dire the situation actually is,” she said.

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