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Thinking of You in Birmingham

On this morning after the evening on which we heard that the Department of Education will revoke its special Guidance relative to protecting transgender students in our country's public schools, I'm thinking of you, a fourteen-year-old transgender girl.

You could live anywhere. Birmingham. Little Rock. Rapid City. Tucson. Charleston. It doesn't matter.

I have a good idea of what you are thinking right now: that when you woke up yesterday, you had the backing of the federal government to protect you at school. That you mattered to the people in Washington, D.C. and that if anything went wrong at your school, you could at least call upon someone in the federal government to help you.

This morning, all of that thinking is gone. Today, February 23, 2017, you're thinking something far different, far more negative.

I don't matter. I'm not good enough to be protected. They don't care about me at all. Do I now have to go back to using the boy's restroom? Even though I wear a dress?

Even worse, you're just beginning to struggle with another thought: *What will it be like at school today? Or tomorrow? Or next week? What will "those" kids say or do? Or the teachers who continue to intentionally misgender me?*

In the days and weeks ahead, all of this will weigh on you. The odds are that you'll become even more depressed than what you already are. Given the astronomical rate of attempted suicides for transgender persons (one study found that 40 percent of trans humans have engaged in suicide attempts), it's likely that suicide will be even more on your mind.

For other readers, I don't think I'm overstating this at all. Just earlier this week, the *Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics* reported on a study that found a 14 percent decrease in suicide attempts by lesbian and gay teenagers who lived in states that legalized same-sex marriage before the Supreme Court's 2015 blanket ruling

in favor of same-sex marriage nationally. Researchers analyzing pre-2015 marriage legalization data theorized that the decrease in suicide attempts was linked to lesbian and gay teens feeling that society was accepting and inclusive.

In other words, people are less likely to take their lives if they feel connected to other humans and the society in which they reside. One would think this is a no-brainer.

Likewise, it's not difficult to see the negative psychological effect of *taking away* one's civil rights, like what happened last night. We can also imagine how that empowers others who hate.

I continue to be amazed by the audacity of people who make decisions that affect the well-being of other humans when those decision-makers have no idea of what it means to be "other." It wouldn't surprise me at all to hear that none of the decision-makers on the DOE Guidance revocation—Donald Trump, Mike Pence, Jeff Sessions or Betsy DeVoss—has ever sat with a trans person and asked, "What's it like to be you?"

To you, our fourteen-year-old trans girl who lives in Birmingham or anywhere else in America, and to any other young transgender human, I say this: **I stand with you. I value you. I have your back.** Email me (elliekrug@gmail.com) to hear about how good life can be if you persevere and believe in yourself. If things are really bad and you're thinking of hurting yourself, immediately call 911 or either the Trevor Project (866-488-7386) or the Trans Lifeline (877-565-8860)—they will talk you off the ledge.

Most of all, know that you ARE worthy. You DO matter. Just as with everything else, you WILL get through this, I am absolutely positive.

Stay alive my dear. The world is a beautiful place when you live authentically, as the TRUE you.

I care about you as do millions of other people you don't yet know. Please love yourself!

ellie