

ETHICS IN CHOOSING A MEETING LOCATION. J. A. Rathbun¹, J. Grier¹, M. Milazzo², and E. G. Rivera-Valentin³, ¹Planetary Science Institute (Rathbun@psi.edu), ²Other Orb, ³John Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory.

Introduction: The location of professional meetings/conferences within the field of planetary science has always been a subject of lively discussion, but current events such as new legislation have underscored concerns about the implications of where meetings are held, and how meeting location impacts the physical and psychological safety of attendees.

Determining Location: Most planetary science meeting locations are chosen via tradition, precedent, or bylaws guidance. Within the DPS, a professional society, the power for determining meeting location is held by the members who either propose a location, or ratify a location chosen by the DPS governing body. LPSC, however, is not situated within the framework of a professional society.

History of LPSC. LPSC is jointly organized by NASA (primarily the Johnson Space Flight Center) and the USRA through the Lunar and Planetary Institute (LPI), both located in Houston, TX. Early LPSC meetings took place at Johnson Space Center (in the Gilruth Building during the 1990s) and moved to the South Shore Harbor Resort in League City, TX, just south of Houston, 2002 through 2008. Since 2009, the meeting has been held in The Woodlands, TX.

Why are meetings important? If you're attending this meeting, you likely have your own answers to this question. The DPS sends out post-meeting surveys and their 2022 survey included a question suggesting that scientists attend DPS for the following reasons, in no priority order: Career development opportunities, reconnecting/socializing with friends, presenting in a science session, interacting with other presenters, interacting with exhibitors, keeping up on the latest science results, and networking opportunities.

Safety: The prime consideration when attending a meeting **MUST** be safety. We cannot ask members of our community to give up their safety to participate in the field. Please note that the following section is written to inform cis-gender members of our community about current issues and contains content that may be upsetting for the marginalized population in question. Our trans-gender and gender non-conforming colleagues may wish to skip this section..

Is Texas safe for all members of our community? Unfortunately, the answer in 2023 is **NO, they are not**. In 2023, the state legislature has taken up at least 35 anti-trans bills that, among other things: limit healthcare for trans people; punish businesses for pro-trans actions; attack educators and education related

to trans-rights [1]. In addition to policies that make transgender scientists feel unsafe in Texas, many people who are pregnant or may become pregnant are unsafe in Texas due to its strict anti-abortion laws. Several scientific conferences, including LPSC, have considered relocating due to the limits in availability of healthcare to pregnant people [2]. Even before the abortion bans, it was difficult to be a woman in Texas [3].

Current laws in Texas include one banning K-12 transgender students from playing sports. The Texas Governor ordered the Department of Family and Protective Services to investigate families and institutions that provide transgender children with affirmative medical care [4]. The Texas Attorney General has said they would plan on re-instituting and defending sodomy laws in Texas [5]. Furthermore, the state of Texas is creating a list of trans individuals [6].

The number of proposed anti-trans bills in Texas is truly staggering. Texas legislators are discussing expanding the legal definition of child abuse to include affirmative medical care as well as outright banning gender-affirming care [7]. Another bill will restrict DEIA speech and activities at Texas universities [8]. Other bills include banning drag shows, banning transgender children in sports, and limiting discussion of LGBTQ+ and gender identity in schools [9].

The result of the above (and many other) pieces of anti-trans legislation has led to the nation's largest pediatric hospital, Texas Children's in Houston, to pause gender therapy at its medical centers [10]. The legislation is indicative of other, more concrete, problems for transgender people in Texas. The Transgender Law Center found that nearly 10% of the murders of transgender individuals in the United States between 2017 and 2021 occurred in Texas [11]. According to that article "The message sent to trans people? We don't want you in our public places. The goal is to keep trans bodies from receiving care. The goal is to keep trans people out of society, whether that means scaring us into isolation or letting us die."

Issues to consider: Transgender and pregnant scientists are not the only scientists who are unsafe in certain locations. Members of other historically excluded and oppressed groups based on demographic characteristics such as race, disability, mental health, etc., may be unsafe in some locations. For example, due to disproportionate police violence against Black

people, the APS will consider police conduct in their choice of meeting location [12].

The perfect place: There is no such thing as a perfect place for a meeting. Other issues need to be considered such as cost, proximity, size of space, etc. But safety must be the first priority (as is called out in several NASA policy documents, i.e. ‘cultivate a robust safety culture’ [13]).

What can you do? As a community, we need to create a compassionate boundary for how we will choose meeting sites. For future meetings, we need to consider locations with more protective policies for transgender people. The figure below [14] shows a map of US states indicating which have protective policies and which have restrictive policies for transgender individuals. Other issues such as race, ethnicity, disability, size, and age, cannot be ignored.

Some authors of this abstract are privileged enough that they do not have safety concerns in Texas. What can you do to help even if you choose to attend LPSC 2023 in Texas, or a state with similar policies?

1. Realize that not every scientist at the conference feels as safe as you do. Some must choose between their safety and their career as a scientist.

2. Seek out and support organizations that defend against anti-trans and anti-abortion policies, including Equality Texas [15], Transgender Education Network of Texas [16], Fund Texas choice [17], and more [18].

3. Seek out and work with local LGBTQ+ organizations, or those at your home institution.

4. Share meeting information and networking opportunities with folks who can’t attend (perhaps on social media or internal mail lists).

5. Advertise the work of scientists who don’t feel safe in Texas (or another meeting) and cannot attend.

6. Support the LPI in its decision to move LPSC in future years. Support alternate locations that provide the greatest safety to attendees.

References: [1] <https://www.equalitytexas.org/legislature/legislative-bill-tracker-2023/> [2] <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-01884-9> [3] <https://www.bizjournals.com/dallas/news/2017/02/10/why-its-hard-to-be-a-woman-in-texas.html> [4] <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/transgender-health-care-community-targeted-slate-texas-bills/story?id=93347307> [5] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/06/29/texas-sodomy-supreme-court-lawrence-paxton-lgbtq/> [6] <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/12/14/ken-paxton-transgender-texas-data/> [7] <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/transgender-health-care-community-targeted-slate-texas-bills/story?id=93347307> [8] <https://www.thefire.org/news/texas-bill-targeting-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-restricts-student-speech-and> [9] <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/11/texas-transgender-ban-drag-shows-criminalize-parents.html> [10] <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/04/how-texas-became-a-virulently-anti-trans-state.html> [11] <https://www.autostraddle.com/the-barriers-that-keep-trans-people-from-thriving-in-texas/> [12] <https://www.aps.org/publications/apsnews/202011/police-conduct.cfm> [13] NASA Policy Document (NPD 8700.1F) [14] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/10/14/anti-trans-bills/> [15] <https://www.equalitytexas.org/> [16] <https://www.transtexas.org/> [17] <https://fundtexaschoice.org/> [18] <https://www.queerency.com/17-organizations-supporting-trans-kids-in-texas/>

■ Many protective policies ■ Some protective policies ■ Protective and restrictive policies ■ Some restrictive policies ■ Many restrictive policies

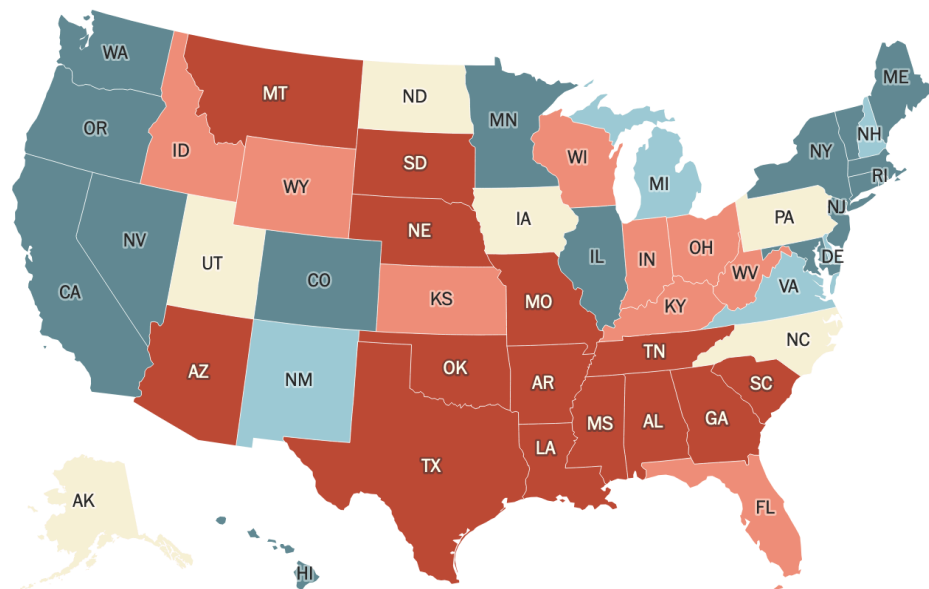


Figure from [14] showing which states have policies restrictive or protective of transgender individuals.