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MISINFORMATION

Bogus trans youth brochure rattles Texas voters

The brochures are just the latest twist in a campaign where Republican candidates have sought to capitalize on anti-trans sentiment in a state with two competitive, high-profile races.

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— Voters in line on the first day of early voting for the midterm election in Texas on Oct. 19, 2026.

Shelby Tauber / Bloomberg via Getty

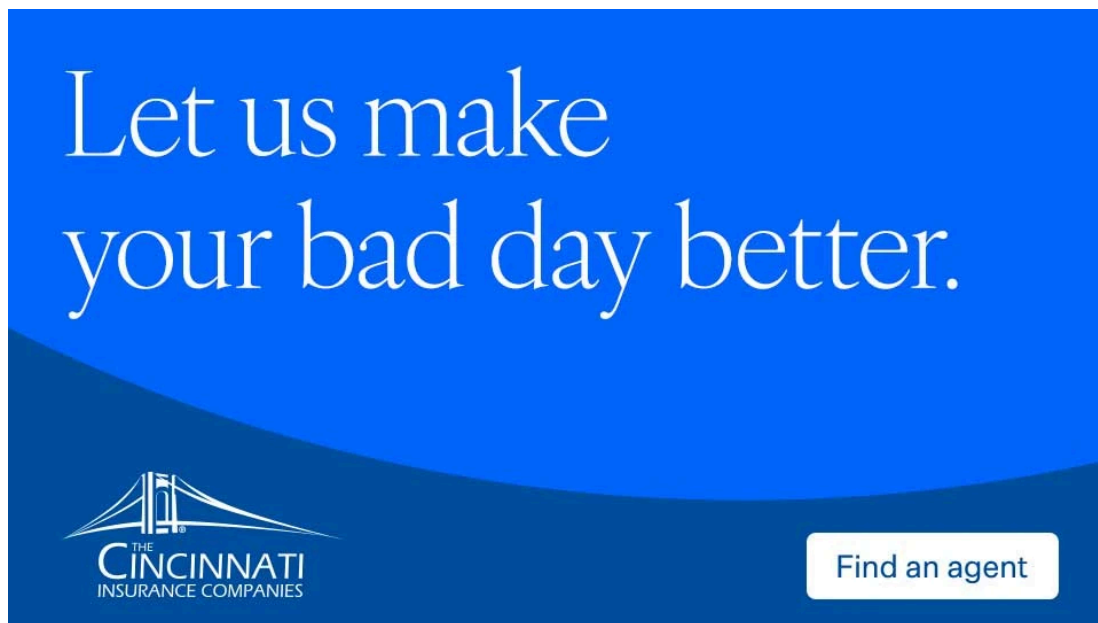
Oct. 21, 2026, 4:57 PM EDT

By Joe Kottke, Jane Lytvynenko and Jo Yurcaba

Phony leaflets and text messages impersonating a trans rights group sent to households across Texas in recent days have ignited anger and confusion across the state at the start of early voting in the midterm elections, an apparent bid to stoke anti-trans sentiment in a heated political battleground.

Who or what is behind the campaign is unclear. Efforts to identify their origins led to a Wyoming company created last month and a digital trail that appears to have been made with care to hide the individuals involved.

ADVERTISING



The glossy brochures were purported to have been sent by the Transgender Education Network of Texas, or TENT. The organization said they were not responsible for the mail-out, leading voters – and TENT – to wonder about the identity of the sender.

Addressed to “students” rather than their parents, the leaflets included instructions on how to become legally separated from parents and advertised hormones and gender-affirming care, linking to TENT’s real website and using similar branding. Many Texans, who received the brochures this week, were outraged that the mail would target their children. Images of the leaflets spread across social media platforms, where conservative influencers angrily posted about them to their national audiences.

The brochures followed an automated text messaging campaign sent to thousands of Texans on Oct. 12 and 13 also impersonating TENT. The organization denied sending the texts and issued a cease and desist to two service providers, who complied but did not disclose their clients.

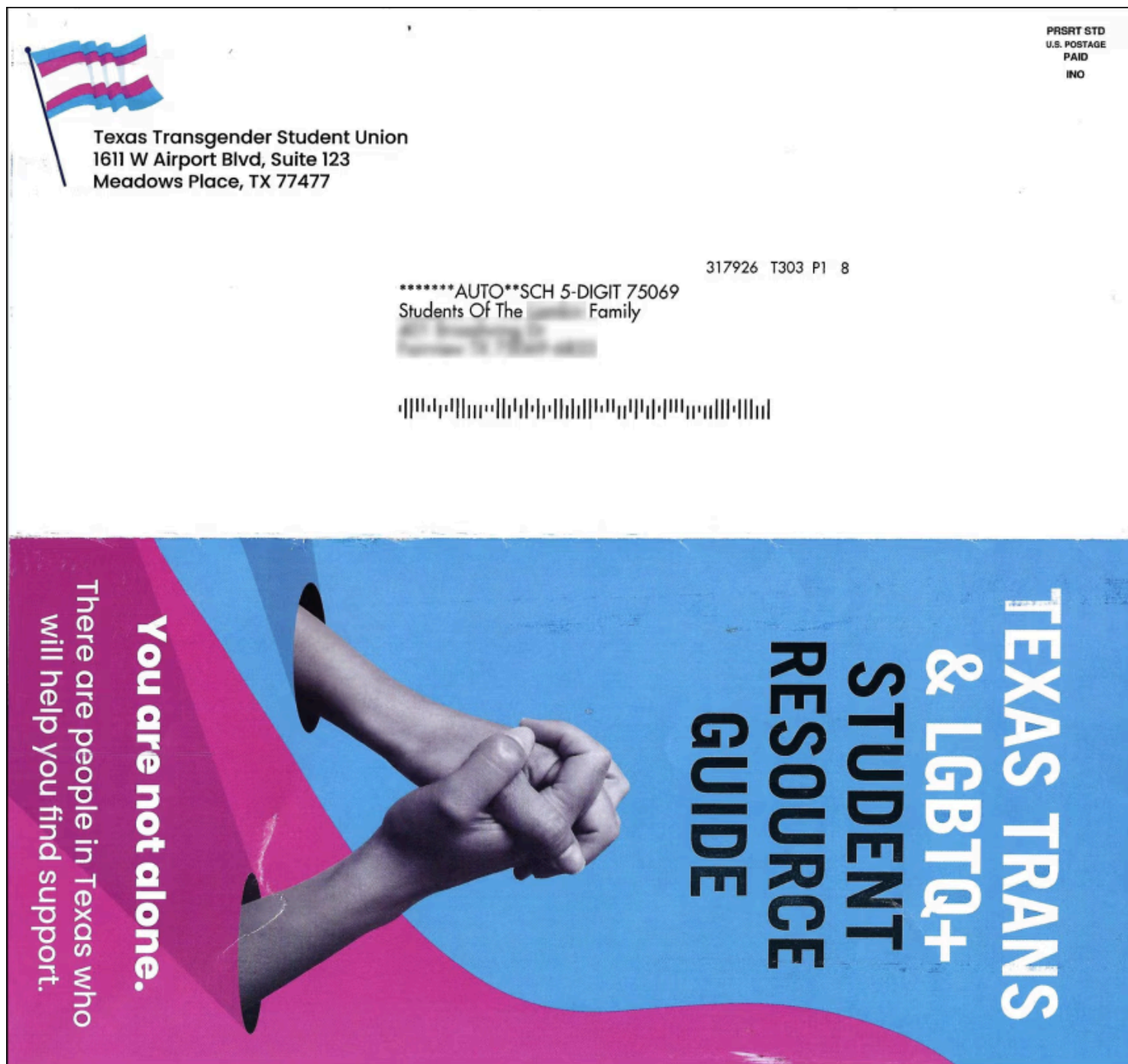
“This was deliberately injected into public conversation right as early voting was taking place and I do not think it was a coincidence,” said Mimi Marziani, an attorney at the Marziani, Steven and Gonzalez law firm retained by TENT.

The brochures are just the latest twist in a campaign where Republican candidates have sought to capitalize on anti-trans sentiment in a state with two competitive, high-profile races – between Democrat James Talarico and Republican Ken Paxton for Senate and between Republican Gov. Greg Abbott and Democratic candidate Gina Hinojosa.

Republicans have made Talarico’s previous comments about his support for trans kids a part of their attack plan. Talarico has said he supports banning trans women and girls from female sports if it endangers safety or fairness and would support a national ban on transition surgeries for minors while supporting other transition care.

Elon Musk’s political group, America PAC, has also [purchased election ads](#) in Texas attacking Talarico with anti-trans narratives.

“There is something deeply wrong with Talarico,” Musk posted Wednesday on X, his social media website, where he also amplified some of the advertisements. There is no evidence linking Musk to the mailers.



— The brochure that was sent to households across Texas.

The funder of the mailing campaign took pains to obscure its origin. The mailer reviewed by NBC News listed the sender as the Texas Transgender Student Union, an organization anonymously incorporated in Wyoming on Sept. 2. The company employed an agency that registers businesses privately.

Marziani issued a cease and desist to the Texas Transgender Student Union Wednesday.

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The return address on the envelope does not exist. It is one digit removed from a UPS Store in Meadows Place, Texas. A worker at the store told NBC News they have been inundated with calls about the brochure, which the employee also received at her home. The worker, who declined to give her name, did not know who may have been behind the campaign.

Marziani said her firm has not been able to determine who funded the campaign but estimated that the effort could have cost millions of dollars based on its reach. She believes millions of Texas households received the mail-outs, including in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, the Texas Panhandle, the Houston Metroplex, San Antonio and Austin.

"If I had to guess, the actual motivation behind these mailers was to create division and strife and confusion among the Texas electorate during the most competitive election that Texas has had in 40 years," Marziani said.

Republican influencers quickly seized on the mailers earlier this week, presenting them as genuine to their online audiences. At least one Republican state legislative candidate, Chris Spencer, ran a Facebook ad promoting a post on his page that featured a photo of the mailers, according to the company's online advertising archive.

"This piece of garbage arrived in Texas mailboxes," his post said. "Folks, our God is not mocked. He will judge sin. He will balance the books and right the wrongs. That is moral depravity hatched in hell. May God find us in Texas faithful."

Spencer did not respond to a request for comment.

Shawn Edwards, a 53-year-old Independent voter in Allen, TX, received a brochure in the mail Monday.

“This is obviously engineered not with the help of the kids in mind, but to inflame parents, to get them to vote against the Democratic side,” he said.

Edwards received both texts before the pamphlet even after responding “stop” to the first one.

“Getting all of these messages in the middle of this just feels like a real dirty trick,” he said, referring to the election. “I am not a fan of using other people in order to push your political gains.”

Another Texas voter, a father living in Austin who asked that his name not be used, said he received the brochure and “fell for it.” His anger only grew when he realized it was fake.

“It’s just sad and pathetic,” he said, “that that’s where we’re at in our political climate.”

‘I felt so guilty’ that ‘I had to officially change parties’: Latino voters shift on Trump

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In addition to confusing voters, the campaign has had a devastating effect on TENT. The organization has had to take down its website, replacing it only with a statement and a donation button. Photos of its staff have circulated in mailing materials and online alongside angry messages. It has also paused a planned tour citing safety risks.

“These instances will not shake our commitment to the dignity and humanity of trans youth, trans Texans, their families, and their loved ones,” TENT said in an emailed statement to NBC News Tuesday. “Trans Texans belong here in Texas, this is our home and we’re not going anywhere.”

Texas state Republican Rep. Jeff Leach sent a formal request to Attorney General Paxton on Oct. 13, asking him to open an investigation into the mass text message campaign.

Leach said he was among those who received a text message and his concerns are “earnest, strong and shared by many.” The messages violate Texas Senate Bill 12, Leach said – a 2025 law that restricted public school activities related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Leach also asked Paxton’s office to determine how names, email addresses, telephone numbers and other personal information were obtained.

“I, like many Texans, am very interested to see what that investigation uncovers and reveals,” Leach said in a statement Thursday. “As always, all I care about is a diligent search for the truth, no matter where that search may lead.”

Paxton did not respond to a request for comment.



Joe Kottke

Joe Kottke is an assignment editor at NBC News covering breaking news across the Americas, including politics, immigration, crime and severe weather.

Jane Lytvynenko

Jane Lytvynenko is a senior technology reporter for NBC News.



Jo Yurcaba

Jo Yurcaba is a reporter for NBC News.
