

# When we abandon care, we abandon ourselves: Jane Fernandes



**Guest columnist, cleveland.com and The Plain Dealer**

Targeted attacks to reduce or restructure health care programs that millions of people depend on for survival have a clear intention, **guest columnist Jane Fernandes writes**. It tells cancer survivors, disabled people, those with mental health conditions or long COVID, and children with congenital illnesses that their lives are too costly to matter. It tells elderly people and low-income families that their safety nets may be pulled away. It tells Black, Brown, Indigenous, and transgender Americans that their health will be subject to the politics of power.

YELLOW SPRINGS, Ohio -- Among the most chilling developments in our current political landscape are proposals in Congress to strip transgender people — especially trans youth — of access to health care, even while leaving broader programs like Medicare or the Affordable Care Act intact.

These targeted attacks are unacceptable, and the message they send is devastating: that some lives are less worthy of care.



To talk about eliminating health care for trans people is to inflict harm. To actually do it would be an act of devastating cruelty.

We see the same logic in threats to eliminate Optional Practical Training for international students. For decades, OPT has allowed students from around the world to gain real-world experience in the U.S. after graduation—advancing research, supporting local economies, and contributing to the national workforce.

More than 240,000 international students currently participate in OPT, many of them in critical STEM fields. Eliminating this program would do more than hurt students—it would undercut American innovation, weaken higher education, and damage our credibility as a global leader.

But the danger doesn't stop there.

The U.S. House of Representatives has introduced measures to significantly reduce or restructure Medicare and Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, programs that millions of people depend on for survival. Even if the Senate does not allow these proposals to move forward in full, the intention behind them is clear. And that intention alone has consequences.

It tells cancer survivors, disabled people, those with mental health conditions or long COVID, and children with congenital illnesses that their lives are too costly to matter. It tells elderly people and low-income families that the safety nets they rely on may be pulled away. It tells Black, Brown, Indigenous, and transgender Americans — those who already face structural barriers to care — that their health will be subject to the politics of power, not the promises of justice.

This is more than a policy disagreement. It is a coordinated strategy of exclusion, one that sacrifices the vulnerable while protecting the wealthy. These proposed rollbacks are part of a larger effort to dismantle public systems designed to meet the needs of people—not profit.

When you connect the dots, a disturbing pattern emerges: strip away care, opportunity, and belonging from the people who need it most, while rewarding those who already have more than enough. These proposals send a loud signal: if you are poor, disabled, trans, undocumented, or born outside the United States, you are on your own.

We should all be asking: Who benefits from this? And who is being sacrificed? The United States has long claimed to be a place where people come to build better lives—through education, through work, and through the promise that if we care for one another, we all thrive. That promise is being broken in real time.

We must not let it slip away.

We must resist the dismantling of Medicare and the ACA, and we must defend programs like OPT that allow young people—regardless of where they were born or how they identify—to contribute to this country's future. In doing so, we are not just protecting policy; we are protecting the idea that a nation's strength is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable.

Let's choose care. Let's choose inclusion. Let's choose each other.

*Jane Fernandes is president of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio.*