

January 22, 2023

Chairperson Koppelman and Committee Members,

I strongly urge a Do NOT Pass on HB 1333. One of the beloved outdoor performances in Bismarck is Capitol Shakespeare. The performance of a Shakespearean play is a wonderful celebration of the arts and community on the capital grounds. Occasionally, the best person for a part is not the same gender as the character. In fact, traditionally, Shakespearean plays were often acted out by actors not matching the gender of the character. Shakespearean plays also have sexual puns and erotic inuendo embedded throughout; yet, the stories have proven to be timeless and of great cultural importance. On these grounds, HB 1333 would ban Capitol Shakespeare and other similar events. “Male or female impersonators” could be applied to any actor who is playing a part that is gender ambiguous or traditionally played by a specific gender even if they are the best actor for the part. Exactly what constitutes a “prurient interest” is subjective. The jokes in Shakespearean plays which walked over the line in the 16th and 17th century may or may not constitute a “prurient interest” today – each individual would need to determine that for themselves. HB 1333, however, would remove the right for each individual and family to make their own decisions on what is appropriate for them.

Another wonderful cultural performance on the capital grounds is the belly dancing group from the YMCA. This exercise group works hard to prepare for performances at the Capital A’Fair and various other events around Bismarck. Belly dancing strengthens the heart as an aerobic exercise and increases flexibility and bone health in the entire body. It is also accessible to people regardless of their ability level and a source of increased self-confidence and self-esteem. However, some people might define belly dancing as “exotic dancing,” because the midriff is usually showing. According to HB 1333, the cultural belly dancing performances and belly dance exercise classes could be defined as “adult cabaret performances.”

I urge a Do NOT Pass on HB 1333.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Deeg
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