

My name is Joseph Larson, and I serve pastor with St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Fargo, ND. I am one of a few openly gay ELCA pastors called by Lutheran congregations in North Dakota. My congregation voted to become welcoming towards LGBTQ individuals and their families over 30 years ago—which was a big deal then and still is today.

I am writing to voice my opposition to HB 1333.

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I have attended dozens of drag performances. Nearly all of them have been funny, joyful, life-giving, creative performances to people who have come to see them in gay bars, at Pride events, or public events. Parents who bring their children to these shows know what they are and tell them what to expect. Many of the children want to attend.

Drag performances have always been a cultural part of our LGBTQ+ community and do not cause harm to anyone. Anyone who is offended by them does not need to attend. There is no need for our state government to legislate them anymore than there is to legislate musicals at public schools, musical performances at colleges, community parades in small towns, or talent shows in churches.

As a pastor, I oppose using our Christian beliefs and morality to mandate legislation. I believe Christ called us to love one another, show compassion to those in need, and not judge others. As the prophet, Micah once said, "What does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

I pray that you will not support HB 1333, and seek to promote legislation that makes North Dakota a welcoming and supportive state for our LGBTQ+ community.

Sincerely,

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