

Senate Judiciary

HB 1333

Monday, March 20, 2023

IN OPPOSITION

Committee Chair and members of the Committee, my name is Audin Rhodes (legally Allison Joyce Rhodes, maiden name Allison Joyce Walker) and I am writing in opposition to HB 1333.

I am a concerned civilian who was born and raised in North Dakota. I am a family services case manager at a statewide organization that helps lower income people receive services to better their lives and families. I am here of my own volition due to the extremely personal stake I have in this legislature. I grew up in the small town of Velva, ND and am now living in Minot, ND. For nearly 30 years I've been here and for well over half my life I've known I was queer.

Growing up in North Dakota did not allow me to easily find the language I needed to express and define myself. Even so, I knew I was different in a queer and gender non-conforming way from a young age. I did not meet an openly trans person until I was in my early 20s and meeting them changed my life. Seeing them live their truth opened my future up to one of joy, clarity, and acceptance instead of denial, confusion, and apathy. Coming into my trans identity feels like coming home. It feels right.

Likewise, I did not attend my first drag performance until I was in my early 20s. However, I wish that an opportunity had been presented to me to see a drag performance in my younger years because I firmly believe it would have helped alleviate some of the confusion and misery within me regarding my gender non-conformity. Representation is crucial to self-acceptance. Seeing someone like oneself, openly flourishing and being themselves is not only inspiring, it is life saving.

From a developmental standpoint, kids have a very fluid understanding of gender. It is really important to have healthy conversations that are developmentally appropriate about gender roles and gender expression being part of art. Drag can help facilitate these conversations. Drag is not a crime and drag is not inappropriate. It is performance, it is comedy, it is art, it is poetry, it is human expression. It is no more or less appropriate than pop star performances from Christina Aguilera and Ariana Grande. Children are allowed to go to those performances based on parental consent and the same principle should be applied to drag performances.

The drag community has long had overlap with gay, trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming identities. Drag is undoubtedly a queer art form but that does not make it obscene. By considering criminal action against drag, the state is making it's position clear that it views it's LGBTQIA+ residents as inappropriate and vulgar. That is harmful and dangerous rhetoric to promote. As a community, we are as diverse as any other group of people living in North Dakota. We are social workers, teachers, veterans, small business owners, republicans, democrats, Christians, mothers, fathers, siblings, and tax paying Americans. We are here and we deserve the

same freedom of expression as anyone else. And we deserve to show our children our art and our history, the same right that any other family has been allowed.

There is no harm in allowing people to live life as their most authentic selves. It costs you nothing to be kind. It costs you nothing to see our shared humanity. That is why I am in strong opposition of HB 1333.

Thank you for reading my testimony. Your consideration of my perspective and the other perspectives of the trans, queer, and gender non-conforming LBTQIA+ community is very much appreciated.

Audin Rhodes

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