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Statement Condemning the Cancellation of a Benefit Drag Show at West Texas A&M University

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The LubbockPRIDE organization would like to publicly express our concern with the sudden cancellation of a drag show (proceeds benefiting the Trevor Project to help prevent LGBTQ+ suicide), which was scheduled for March 31st at West Texas A&M University. The reasons expressed for cancelling the show are very troubling. The President of the University, Walter V. Wendler, put out a 2-page letter claiming that drag shows are a general affront to human dignity and derogatory towards women. Dr. Wendler makes a valiant effort to justify his actions in not allowing the drag show on campus but as members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community, we know that his arguments are a thinly veiled excuse to hide behind. We implore him to take a bold stand WITH humanity, reverse his statement to allow the benefit drag show to continue, and to stop bullying the LGBTQ+ community, especially the drag community.

We understand the pressures people in positions of power have from sponsors, donors, regents, parents, etc., however, there is never an excuse to cancel an event that a select few people have an issue with over the right of another group to be who they are. This group merely wants to express themselves for their enjoyment, the enjoyment of others, and to raise money for "a noble cause", as Wendler himself expressed. Claiming that one group's social justice is more important than another is extremely hypocritical, especially when it is based on false premises. The idea that drag debases or degrades women is antithetical to the true purpose of drag and clearly shows the misconception of some people. Further, WTA&M's President mentions James Madison and Thomas Jefferson in his letter, stating that they embodied the idea of being in God's image, and therefore have dignity in their development of our nation. Does Wendler forget that both men were slaveowners? By this alone, they clearly are not the best people to offer as pillars of providing dignity to others.

Drag comes from the fact that gender norms placed on society do not make sense for queer people. They are expressing that nothing biological pigeonholes them into a defined category.



Similar expression has been shown at different times throughout history, as men wore heels and wigs and women, in some societies, were the warriors of their culture. Drag performers may poke fun at the social trappings that currently define feminism, but never women. Many drag performers celebrate and luxuriate in femininity; others blend both feminine and masculine social identifiers. The purpose of drag is to expose the truth of gender as merely a social construction, and that it is available to be adjusted, played with, and curated. Many drag performers are also non-binary or trans women, so drag is not just “men in dresses” and definitely not the equivalent of “blackface for women”.

Some people that perform drag are also cisgender women. They often perform in ‘hyper-feminine’ character, to intensify their depiction of the social expectations placed on them as well. Cisgender women also may feel oppressed in a “gender prison”, i.e., feeling the pressures from society to put on make-up daily to make themselves presentable to men. Being able to take it over the top in a drag performance allows them to be free from the burden of societal expectations and find creative ways to express themselves.

Wendler himself, in one of his many videos explaining how universities should operate, talks about how universities should “bring value to the larger community” and “cause reflective thought.” Is that what Wendler is attempting to do by censoring the values of part of his own community and not allowing others to reflect on the principles of promoting the acceptance of differences in that community? West Texas A&M also claims an accolade as being one of the safest places in the country to attend college. However, by this action, it is placing undue safety risks on the LGBTQ+ community and its allies, as public comments disparaging the community have the potential for physical and mental harm. The increased risk of self-harm and suicide of youth in the LGBTQ community is well-established. Research shows suicidal behavior and ideation amongst LGBTQ individuals is anywhere from four to eight times higher than their heterosexual and cisgender peers.

We ask that the community reach out to West Texas A&M University to let them know this wonderful event, meant to help the LGBTQ+ community, must be reinstated. By cancelling this event, they are instead hurting the LGBTQ+ community. We stand with Buffs for Drag.

In solidarity,

LubbockPRIDE