

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR LINDSEY P. HORVATH

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Response to Increase in Anti-LGBTQ+ Hate Incidents Across Los Angeles County

LGBTQ+ communities in Los Angeles County and throughout the state and nation have endured a disturbing rise in hate over the last several years. From book bans to acts of violence, members of the Los Angeles’ vibrant LGBTQ+ community have found hate closer to their doorstep every day. As part of Los Angeles County’s efforts to combat hate and promote equity, diversity, and inclusion, concrete steps must be taken to protect LGBTQ+ community members and allies in Los Angeles County.

The LGBTQ+ community is broad and diverse, as are the forms of hate that the community experiences. In a recent report, GLAAD – the world’s largest gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer media advocacy organization – found that hate online and on social media is the highest against those in the LGBTQ+ community.¹ Sixty-six percent of those in the LGBTQ+ community say that they have experienced harassment online, and 54% categorized their online harassment as “severe.” GLAAD attributes this rise to political extremism and the labeling of members of the LGBTQ+ community as “groomers” or “pedophiles” – a demeaning trope intended to ostracize LGBTQ+

¹ “GLAAD 2022 Social Media Safety Index,” GLAAD, 2022, <https://assets.glaad.org/m/29b001007886ae77/original/2022-GLAAD-Social-Media-Safety-Index.pdf>.

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community members and undermine the progress that the fight for LGBTQ+ equality has made. In addition to harmful rhetoric, there has also been a proliferation of deceptive disinformation targeting transgender youth and gender affirming care. Rightfully, the LGBTQ+ community and allies have countered these harmful tactics and disinformation campaigns with affirming events and spaces that uplift LGBTQ+ community and culture.

An important part of the community's present-day culture manifested into what is now a widely-known and celebrated art form: drag. Drag challenges gender norms and constraints, and at times embraces irreverent commentary on traditional notions of gender and sexuality. Drag ranges from nightclub performances for adults to civic education and library events for younger audiences. Since at least the 19th century in the United States, drag performers have been at the forefront of advocating for and securing rights for the LGBTQ+ community. For example, José Sarria was not only a drag performer, but he was also the first openly gay political candidate in California and the nation. In the 1950s and 1960s, Sarria challenged discriminatory policies in San Francisco; organized the first LGBTQ+ voting bloc through his campaign; and later established the Imperial Court System which continues to fundraise and advocate for LGBTQ+ causes – a full decade before Harvey Milk first ran for office.

The Human Rights Campaign described 2022 as having an “epidemic of violence” impacting transgender and gender non-conforming people in the United States.² In 2022 alone, 34 individuals who identified as transgender or gender non-conforming were killed at the time of the publishing of the report referenced above. Seventy-seven percent of these deaths happened to those under the age of 35, and 44%

² “An Epidemic of Violence 2022,” HRC Digital Reports, accessed November 1, 2023, <https://reports.hrc.org/an-epidemic-of-violence-2022>.

of those cases remain unsolved. This violence directly impacts drag artists and all artists who defy traditional gender norms and roles in their art.

Additionally, GLAAD released their first comprehensive count and analysis of increased threats, protests, and violent actions against drag events nationwide.³ GLAAD found 161 incidents of anti-LGBTQ+ protests and threats targeting drag events since early 2022, with a sharp uptick during Pride season in 2022 and increasing ever since. Rhetoric against drag performers and artists appeared in numerous 2022 political campaign ads, and escalated to violence, such as the firebombing of a Tulsa donut shop that hosted a drag event in October 2022.⁴ Participants in anti-drag events include the Proud Boys, white supremacists, and religious extremists. The 2022 GLAAD analysis found that California was in the top five states with the most anti-drag protests and threats, with six such occurrences taking place in 2022 and numerous additional incidents in 2023.

In 2023, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue released a report on anti-drag mobilization efforts targeting LGBTQ+ people in the US, finding that the first five months of 2023 have seen more incidents of anti-drag protests, online and offline threats, and violence toward the LGBTQ+ community than in the last seven months of 2022, an alarming upwards trend.⁵ Analysts found that those behind anti-drag activity are not just traditional anti-LGBTQ+ groups but include growing numbers of domestic extremists and white supremacists, to parents' rights activists, members of anti-vaccine groups, and

³ GLAAD, "Updated Report: Drag Events Faced More than 160 Protests and Significant Threats since Early 2022," GLAAD, April 25, 2023, <https://glaad.org/anti-drag-report/>.

⁴ GLAAD, "Updated Report: Drag Events Faced More than 160 Protests and Significant Threats since Early 2022," GLAAD, April 25, 2023, <https://glaad.org/anti-drag-report/>.

⁵ Tim Squirrell and Jacob Davey, "A Year of Hate: Understanding Threats and Harassment Targeting Drag Shows and the LGBTQ+ Community," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2023, <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Understanding-Threats-and-Harassment-Targeting-Drag-Shows-and-the-LGBTQ-Community.pdf>.

fundamentalist Christian nationalists. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue also finds an increasing number of incidents where online hate speech has manifested into offline activity – for example, slurs being found spray painted on locations that host drag events. While public debate about what is appropriate entertainment for children, and at what ages, can be legitimate, the derogatory and sometimes violent tactics used by these groups undermine civil public discourse, with chilling consequences for constitutional rights to speech and assembly.

Drag performance and events do not represent the entirety of LGBTQ+ community or culture. However, due to the public association of drag with LGBTQ+ communities, analyzing anti-drag mobilization efforts can provide insight into the key actors engaged in anti-LGBTQ+ activism as well as narratives and tactics used to attack these communities. Given the increasingly hostile environment LGBTQ+ communities face, and the increase in targeted violence, it is crucial to better understand the roots, causes, and dynamics of anti-LGBTQ+ activism and extremism.

In addition to the verbal, online, and physical hate targeting LGBTQ+ individuals, extremist groups have engaged in acts that have prevented LGBTQ+ individuals from safely accessing public events and spaces throughout Los Angeles County. These public spaces – such as libraries, health clinics, community centers, schools, and meeting locations of elected bodies – have more regularly become places of confrontation, causing people responsible for protecting public safety to regard them as sensitive sites. Such places have not only been sites of anti-LGBTQ+ hate demonstrations, but they have also been at the center of protests against all gender minorities – such as women who try to access abortion and reproductive health care – who have also been targeted by

opposition groups. Protests have varied from basic sign displays, to violence and clear violations of the rights of members of protected classes under California law. Sensitive sites must be fully protected for all who seek access.

On Wednesday, October 25, 2023, many of the aforementioned tactics and groups manifested in a very real, very dangerous way at a Drag Storytime event scheduled with the San Fernando Branch of the Los Angeles County Library, featuring Pickle the Drag Queen, the West Hollywood Drag Laureate. This programming was part of the County's celebration of LGBTQ+ History Month, which was unanimously supported by the Board of Supervisors. As the event was planned to begin – despite the presence of local law enforcement officials – protestors blocked and pounded on doors; intimidated would-be attendees by encroaching on personal space; and shouted obscenities and slurs at Third District and Library staff. Pickle the Drag Queen was not able to safely enter the San Fernando Branch of the Los Angeles County Public Library. Even as County officials and staff departed, the protestors were able to physically intimidate individuals and surround vehicles, including placing a baby stroller in the way of a vehicle attempting to leave the premises. Libraries – and all public spaces – must not become the breeding grounds for the indoctrination of hate in our communities, nor can any sensitive site or public facility or event allow these types of tactics, which cause danger and trauma and incite violence.

In addition to the incident in the City of San Fernando, this past Sunday, October 29, 2023, at 1:30 AM, a UCLA student was targeted and physically injured. A white sedan approached the student, and an occupant yelled a homophobic slur and shot the student in the face with a BB gun, striking him below the eye. These acts of hate are just two of

many reported throughout Los Angeles County, and must be fully investigated and pursued to the fullest extent of the law. Hate has no place in Los Angeles County.

The Board of Supervisors has taken serious steps over the past years to combat hate. From LA vs Hate programming and research, to the Abortion Safe Haven Project, Los Angeles County is serious about combatting hate and maintaining safety for all residents, especially our most targeted and vulnerable communities. To enshrine the work done by the County and its community partners, and to further build on this regional work, a template for safety measures around identified sensitive sites and events is needed, so that best practices are shared and government agencies have a blueprint from which to work with their community partners to protect individuals' rights and to keep all community members safe.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the following:

1. Instruct the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), in collaboration with Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD), Los Angeles County Anti-Racism and Diversity Initiative (ARDI), the Los Angeles County Library, the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission and in consultation with County partners including Equality California, the Los Angeles LGBT Center, Planned Parenthood Los Angeles, the TransLatin@ Coalition, ONE Institute, San Fernando Valley LGBTQ Center, LA vs. Hate, Somos Familia Valle, GALAS LGBTQ+ Armenian Society, the Williams Institute, the Anti-Defamation League, the City of Los Angeles, the City of West Hollywood, and the City of San Fernando,

to provide a report back to the Board of Supervisors in 120 days with the following:

- a. The number of reported homophobic, transphobic, anti-LGBTQ+ incidents that have occurred over the last five years in the County, including any trends or data available regarding the incidents;
 - b. Measures the County has taken in response to the increase in homophobic, transphobic, and anti-LGBTQ+ incidents; and
 - c. Additional measures the County can take to ensure the safety of LGBTQ+ members in the County, including drag artists and performers.
2. Instruct the CEO in collaboration with relevant County departments, and in consultation with the aforementioned County partners, to report back in 180 days with recommendations for a Community Sensitive Site Safety Blueprint that can be shared with local jurisdictions and community organizations throughout Los Angeles County. The report back should include best practices for securing sensitive sites, such as libraries, community centers, and health centers, to ensure that public programming and/or services are not halted by violence or threats of violence, while maintaining the constitutionally-protected rights of all participants. The report back should also provide an analysis of creating a dedicated liaison within the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department to create security plans and protocols for community programming and services at sensitive sites.

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