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Vote NO on HSB 158

This bill is transparent in its efforts to further criminalize queer folk and our freedom of expression. The guise of “protection of children” is a thinly veiled attempt at vilifying queer people, and the fact of the matter is that bills like this are a distraction from real issues that are more crucial to our daily lives. Instead, bills like this are getting unwarranted time. A bill that **will** embolden further harassment, violence, and outward hatred toward the queer community in this state—even more so than there already is now.

For children, this bill is denying them their rights and their parents’ rights to see queer joy in all its forms around them at a young age. The inner-hatred that unsupported queer children feel can be counteracted by our joyful community events with queer adults and performances where they see that queerness can be celebrated rather than scorned. Both the celebration of difference and the shame of difference are learned as toddlers and young children, and shame in particular is damaging and difficult to unlearn.

Contrary to the ideas this bill is founded upon, performers ensure that their content is appropriate during events where children are present like story times and family friendly shows. This form of gender expression and performance gives **all** children a window into how their existence and being can defy norms. It shows them that all they need to be is their **true self**.

The value of family friendly queer performances for ALL children has been repeatedly denied. The denial comes from you legislators and parents who have succumbed to the fear mongering propaganda pushed by the state and media. The denial and fear mongering comes from a lack of experience or knowledge rather than a hatred for queer people. Consider how many of those vehemently against children attending a drag storytime event have anyone close to them that is queer? How many have a queer extended family member that has become significantly less involved in the family or cut them off? How many know queer history from the last century to many centuries ago? I do not have to guess the answers to those questions for most representatives and senators regardless of their side of the aisle.

Because of this ignorance and inexperience, you legislators proposed bill that is nothing but damaging to children. Do you not think that Catholics like me are queer? Can you imagine that your child raised in the church is actually queer? Now can you imagine the damage that is caused by absorbing the hatred in the media? Can you imagine how wrong you end up feeling

and how dangerous that is to their lives? Can you imagine your child, raised as a girl their whole life, killing themselves because of this self-hatred imposed by the church or the government?

Truly imagine that's your son or daughter. Imagine the pain caused by feeling alone and wrong. Imagine the shame, not of their identity, but rather a shame that doesn't belong to them, imposed by the media, the government, religion, and the home environment. By sheltering your child from all the different ways of being there are, you are causing immense damage, whether you perceive it or not.

To return to the more concrete issue at hand, drag has value for adult and children alike. The value in children seeing that it is okay for them to be creative, express themselves, and celebrate themselves—no matter how different they might be! Do you not see that this legislation is denying them an experience like this?

The fact of the matter is that I believe you all do see but choose to act differently. You see the danger: the problems this legislation, particularly in conjunction with other executive orders and proposed legislation, will cause for our queer children. You see that it denies children an opportunity to celebrate all differences. You know this, and you loudly and vocally support this damaging bill.

Why? Because you would rather kill difference and put your children in danger rather than supporting them as they are. Or almost worse, you've abandoned all states of critical thought for the sake of adhering to propaganda and the emotions that it elicits and prejudices it preys upon? Because it's easy? Because it's supported by the higher levels of government? Only one thing I know for sure, it's NOT because it's right.

A sad part of this bill is that it's an open denial that humans are in a constant process of becoming. Children are not born the way YOU want, will not turn out the way that YOU dream—they are their own person. Wielding this level of control over not only YOUR child but ALL is a maladjusted response to a perceived loss of control that parents have never and will never have over their children. One day, your queer child will look at you, plead for you to change and accept them, and they may never forgive you for the damage you caused by forcing them into a closet and vilifying their existence. **Even straight children will grow with shame in their bones, absorbed in a childhood where difference was never celebrated in any true form.**

This is all to say that this bill is damaging to not just queer folks but to all.

Not only is this bill damaging, but it is just one in a long list of others that serve as a distraction from the real issues that face our population. Please. Stop with this culture war and the criminalization and denial of those that are different from you. Can we not come together on the real issues that we care about? Like creating more barriers to prevent wage theft companies commit against their employees. Finding ways to support families that go hungry and struggle finding resources with inflation not changing anytime soon. Creating bills and changing the

budget such that prioritizes advancing our public schools that the majority of our population relies on. Strengthening protections for minors in the workplace.

The biggest shame is that these types of issues are not the primary focus of the legislature any longer. It's now a place for lawmakers to waste time on pointless bills such as this that do nothing more than further cause division and strife within our communities. Why not waste time? You get paid and often re-elected as an incumbent regardless. So then.. What use is a moral compass in the game of politics? A moral compass and the will of the people WILL NEVER be as important to a politician as maintaining control by strictly and enthusiastically adhering to the platform of their party.

It all becomes more and more clear each cycle... You do not want to strengthen our communities and our state. You want your population to be controlled and for your power to be maintained if not increased. You should be ashamed to allow such legislation to clog up the entire system that we desperately need you to use effectively.

As a lifelong Iowan and constituent who has never truly felt heard or seen by this state, I beg you take a step back from politicizing the existence of others and to simply... do better.