



EDITOR'S NOTE: Unlike many other forms of censorship, challenges to drag queen storytimes generally don't target authors, titles, or content, but rather the method in which stories are presented to children. This compilation is by no means an exhaustive list of recent library events with drag queen readers, but a look at some that generated a significant level of controversy.

Evansville, Indiana

A trustee on the board of the Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library (EVPL) lost her seat after supporting the library's plans for an event with drag queens and kings reading to children. The Vanderburgh County Council declined to re-appoint Barbara Williams to the EVPL board at a meeting on February 6.

However, another Vanderburgh County public body that also appoints some of the EVPL board members, the County Commission, resisted calls to remove a public library board member they had appointed. At a meeting on February 12, a group of citizens opposed to drag queen storytimes asked the commission to remove Sabrina Stewart Thomas. The commissioners unanimously agreed to let Thomas serve until the end of term, to avoid the precedent of removing library board members every time they disagreed with a decision.

The controversial story hour was held on February 23 at Evansville's North Park library. Approximately 275 children and guardians attended to hear one of four storybook reading sessions hosted by drag performer Owen Jackson, performing under the name Florintine Dawn. An additional 150 kids and their guardians were turned away due to capacity, but were able to participate in other activities around the venue.

About 25 protesters and counter-protesters (separated by police) gathered outside without incident.

Steve Ary, a local pastor who has spoken publicly against drag queen storytimes, said, "We are not here to reject the LGBTQ community. We are here simply to reject the program."

After the event, it remained a hot topic of discussion at the next library board meeting, on March 14. No decision was made at the meeting about whether the library will host additional drag queen storytimes. Reported in: WNIN-FM, February 6, 2019; WFIE 14 News, February 11, 2019; *LGBTQ Nation*, February 24, 2019; *tristatehomepage.com*, February 5, February 12, March 14, 2019.

Louisville, Kentucky

A Drag Queen Storytime event has been canceled without explanation by the Louisville Free Public Library.

The event, scheduled for March 30 at the Southwest branch, was supposed to feature members of the Derby City Sisters reading to children. The event would have been the first event of its kind for the Louisville library system, and sparked a social media firestorm, both before and after it was canceled.

Some people opposed to the event wrote hateful comments on Facebook about the LGBTQ community ahead of the cancellation, while others criticized the library system for backing down, suggesting it was because of the potential controversy.

Lee Burchfield, interim director of the Louisville Free Public Library system, told the *Courier-Journal* that the decision wasn't "because it was a Drag Queen Storytime," but he repeatedly declined to provide a reason.

"We had to cancel this one, but we're committed to hosting an event like this in the future," Burchfield said.

Louisville's library employee union, AFSCME Local 3425, said the library's decision "can be interpreted as folding to intolerant forces seeking to make the library a less welcoming place to LGBTQIA [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual/allies] patrons and staff."

The union statement added, "Libraries are meant to be safe community spaces for everyone no matter their class, race, sexuality, gender or origin."

The Derby City Sisters are a Louisville group dedicated to empowering the LGBTQ community and the city through community service, outreach, advocacy, and education for safer sex awareness.

Shawn Woodside, who goes by Sister Wilma and is the president of the Derby City Sisters, said the group has received multiple offers to host a similar event and is in the process of deciding which opportunities to take.

Derby City Sisters has about 50 members in Louisville, but is part of a global organization called the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, he said. Many members of Derby City Sisters grew up with "little to no positive affirmation," Woodside said, and this motivates them to reach out to children.

"The simple act of a drag queen, or clown, or really anyone who chooses to present their art in an outward physical expression, reading a story book and making a craft affirms to kids that there is a place in the world for them. That they are important, and they are loved," Woodside said. Reported in: *Louisville Courier-Journal*, March 8, March 12, 2019.

Lafayette, Louisiana

After months of protests, cancellations, postponements, changes of venue, and a federal lawsuit, the



Lafayette Public Library (LPL) finally had a drag queen storytime in its South Regional Library on Sunday, February 2.

Three drag queens wearing vibrant garb and protected by a police escort read books to children, while protesters gathered on the lawn outside. Just days before, a lawsuit to stop the event was dismissed (*see page 54*).

Originally scheduled to take place in October in a different library building, LPL's Main Library, the event drew so much interest—both from people planning to attend and from people planning to protest—that the library cancelled the event. A college that offered its campus instead also cancelled plans for the drag queen storytime, citing security concerns.

While the event was still being debated in public and in court, Lafayette Mayor-President Joel Robideaux expressed his opposition. This led Joseph Gordon-Wiltz, the only member of the library board appointed by Robideaux, to resign from the LPL board.

For Dylan Pontiff, who becomes drag queen Santana Pilar Andrews when he dons a gown and wig, the event was a massive success and a way to teach children the importance of respecting others' differences.

Pontiff and two other drag queens—Roxie C. Black and Kenli Andrews—read three books about respecting differences: *The Boy with the Rainbow Heart*, *Love Is Love*, and *Jacob's New Dress*.

The three are not affiliated with the national Drag Queen Story Hour organization.

Protesters outside held signs reading “Don't drag children's innocence through the mud” and “Drag Queen Story Time = Childhood's End.”

Library Director Teresa Elberson said the event was in no way sponsored by the library, in part because

there is still time for an appeal to revive the federal lawsuit.

The library hired six Lafayette Police Department officers for security at the event and allowed the use of the public meeting room, because, Elberson said, “We had to let them use the room. They had the right to use the room.” Reported in: *Acadiana Advocate*, January 3, 2019; *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, February 6, 2019.

Anne Arundel County, Maryland

After a Drag Queen Story Time program was held at the Glen Burnie Regional Library in the fall, the board of trustees of the Anne Arundel County Public Library voted in December to take approval power over controversial programs.

Previously, the programs were planned by the professional library staff under CEO Skip Auld.

In an editorial, the *Capital Gazette*, a local newspaper, said the board's vote “is a step toward rejecting titles on bookshelves and or in video collections because the ideas are unpopular or uncomfortable. Picking a CEO should be the board's only tool for influencing content.”

In addition to drag queen storytimes, the library board is holding up more than a dozen events centered on LGBTQ and women's health issues, according to Auld. Such programming is “in limbo,” he said. Reported in: *Capital Gazette*, March 13, March 18, 2019.

Astoria, Oregon

Messages before a Drag Queen Story Hour at the Astoria Library warned of possible violent protests, but the event proceeded calmly on February 9.

The event's primary critic, Miles Rudduck of Warrenton, announced on social media earlier in the week that he planned to peacefully protest,

but also indicated to library staff and Astoria police that violent protests could be possible from others, according to Police Chief Geoff Spalding.

At the event, Ruddick stood outside with three other men. Wearing a red “Make America Great Again” hat, he livestreamed videos for his Facebook page, proclaiming his view that the reading was harmful to children.

No violent protests erupted, and attendance surpassed a similar reading last summer.

More than 100 adults and children were in attendance this year as Marco Davis, a community volunteer performing in drag as “Miss Daylight,” read three picture books. Reported in: *Daily Astorian*, February 9, 2019.

Greenville County, South Carolina

A controversial Drag Queen Story Hour at the Five Forks branch of the Greenville County Library System was canceled by officials on Tuesday, February 12, then uncanceled on Wednesday, February 13, and held on Sunday, February 17.

An estimated 150 people, including dozens of children, attended the two-hour event, according to the *Greenville News*.

Meanwhile, a similar number of protesters and counter-protesters gathered outside of the library.

The story hour, with four drag queens reading to children in the library, was organized by a group called Mom's Liberal Happy Hour SC. The event was not sponsored by the library.

Greenville County Library System Executive Director Beverly James wrote in an email that the reason for the cancellation was that an online invitation advertising the event, posted on eventbrite.com, made it appear that public library space would



be used for a private event. Library policy prohibits ticketed events.

Rylee Hunty, one of the event organizers, said his group had created an online sign-up with free tickets to try to manage crowd size. They filed a separate application to use a room at the library for the story hour without the use of tickets, and the new application was approved.

Prior to the event, Greenville County Council chairman Butch Kirven released a statement about the drag queen storytime: “Speaking for myself, I believe that if it were in County Council’s power, the activity scheduled at the Five Forks Branch Library on Sunday afternoon, February 17th, would be shut down immediately.”

He said his criticism of the event was not over lifestyle choices, but that the event was an abuse of privilege by using the library to promote a narrow agenda.

GOP Politics of South Carolina planned a counter-event to be held at the same time outside the library, featuring pastor and political spokesperson Mark Burns and special guest Sen. Lee Bright. The organizers of the protest posted the following on Facebook: “We will not allow this type of evil, liberal agenda to come in and pollute our town and disrupt our community using a public platform to profit off of this publicity stunt being pulled by the left. Let’s stand together.”

Defending the drag queen storytime, Hunty said, “It’s simply going and existing as human beings in an environment to teach tolerance and acceptance of diversity.”

The controversy continued to resonate after the drag queen storytime was over, and it is one reason South Carolina lawmakers are proposing new legislation to require all libraries to report their finances

to the state. The bill would require libraries that receive state aid to send in quarterly reports with a list of the library’s activities. If they fail to report, the proposed legislation would take the money back and put it in the state’s general fund. Reported in: WYFF News 4, February 7, 2019; *Greenville News*, February 12, 2019; WYFF Channel 4, February 13, 2019; WVOC, February 14, 2019; FITS-news, February 18, 2019; Fox Carolina, February 20, 2019.

Houston, Texas

The Houston Public Library (HPL) has hosted monthly Drag Queen Storytimes at various library branches, mostly the Freed-Montrose Library, since September 2017. The events have generated an increasing amount of controversy. The storytime series was started by Trent Lira and Devin Will, who have been involved in most of the Houston Drag Queen Storytimes until they stepped down in March 2019.

At first, Drag Queen Storytime “flew under the radar,” according to *OutSmart*, which calls itself “Houston’s LGBTQ magazine.” The low profile changed in 2018, the magazine wrote, “when KHOU-TV highlighted a July 9 installment at the Heights Branch featuring drag queen Blackberri.”

After that, City Councilman Michael Kubosh complained about Drag Queen Storytime during the council’s July 2018 meeting. Protesters began standing outside, beginning with that month’s storytime at HPL’s Montrose Branch on July 28. At each of the following storytimes, protesters and counter-protesters positioned themselves outside of the library.

The storytimes drew national attention, and some right-wing Christian activists from outside of Houston filed a federal lawsuit in September

2018 to try to keep drag queen events out of Houston public libraries. The US District Court threw out the lawsuit on January 3 (*see page 55*).

The drag queen storytimes remained popular, and the Houston Public Library began hosting back-to-back storytimes to accommodate a growing number of attendees.

Organizers Lira and Will wrote an op-ed piece in the March 19 issue of *Houstonia* magazine to explain what happened next. After the lawsuit was filed in October, they wrote,

The protests intensified. At that time, we gave the HPL legal department a comprehensive list of every guest performer, every book read, and every song sung. From that point forward, if any performers wanted to be involved in our story time, or if previous performers wanted to read in the future, they needed to apply as volunteers and undergo background checks—an existing library policy that, until then, had not been enforced in this case, an oversight for which the library has apologized.

A national anti-LGBTQ group dug up some dirt on one drag queen who had been a reader at some storytimes before the library started background checks. Albert Garza, a 32-year-old registered sex offender, participated in the program under the name Tatiana Mala-Niña, according to the Massachusetts-based MassResistance.

In their op-ed, Lira and Will continued,

Everyone who has performed since October—including ourselves—has undergone a background check and has clean records. It is frustrating that the past conviction of a single performer now undermines the efforts of three dozen other drag kings and queens who have delighted



parents and children alike with songs, costumes, and most importantly, stories. . . .

Houston Public Library has not wavered in their support of Drag Queen Story Time, which we are extremely grateful for. But ourselves and our library team believe it is time to step away and not continue with the program in March or for the foreseeable future.... People are being threatened. People are being hurt. We believe in what we're doing,

but we don't believe in putting our friends, our families, or our children in danger. If another person or persons wants to continue our effort or host their own event at some point down the line, they have every right to do so, and it's likely somebody will. Drag Queen Story Time belongs to everyone, not just the two of us.

Library officials acknowledged Garza's 2009 conviction in a

statement. "We assure you that this participant will not be involved in any future HPL programs," the library's statement reads. "We deeply regret this oversight and the concern this may cause our customers. We realize this is a serious matter." Reported in: *Houston Chronicle*, January 27, 2019; March 17, 2019; *OutSmart*, March 19, 2019; *Houstonia*, March 19, 2019.