



*EDITOR'S NOTE: An increasing number of challenges to free expression focus on "drag queen storytimes," where the target is usually not the titles, contents, nor authors of any specific books, but rather who is reading them. In this version of storytimes where picture books are read aloud to children, performers dressed in drag (usually men dressed in theatrically feminine costumes) try to encourage both a love of reading and acceptance of diversity. Some of the performers and events are affiliated with Drag Queen Story Hour, a network of local organizations that began in San Francisco; others are independent. Throughout this section, we use the acronym LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) unless a quoted source uses a different one.*

## LIBRARIES Vallejo, California

Drag Queen Story Hour at Vallejo's John F. Kennedy Library in Vallejo, California on June 17, 2019, drew parents and children to hear a book read by Sacramento resident "Apple Adams," while a lone protester with a homemade sign, and a much larger number of Solano Pride Center counter-protesters, stood outside.

The protester, Don Grundmann of Santa Clara, said he has formed a group called The California Straight Pride Coalition, to combat what he said he believes is a movement designed to groom young children to accept aberrant behavior.

"I go all over the place for this," he said. "This is a special kind of evil that must be stopped. The reading is a cover story; it's about mentally making the children accept degeneracy as normal."

His Vallejo protest was Grundmann's "first foray into the public arena," he said. "But," he claimed, branches of his coalition "are springing up all across the country."

By the end of the event, three more protesters showed up, including frequent *Vallejo Times-Herald* letter-to-the-editor writer Ryan Messano, who often rails against homosexuals and other issues he believes are leading the country down a negative path.

One of the counter-protesters was Michael Wilson of Vallejo, aide to Solano County Supervisor Erin Hannigan and the city's second openly gay Councilman in the early 2000s.

"I'm an advocate of Pride Month and the activities going on with that," he said. "Supervisor Hannigan supports the Solano Pride Coalition and the good work they do. She and I advocate for equal rights for all people."

Tom Bilbo of the Solano Pride Center said he and several others were there to ensure the children who wanted to listen to story time were able to do so without interference.

Bilbo said his group recruited Friday's performer and that anyone brought to read to children is thoroughly vetted. The drag queen story hour is about getting dressed up and bringing joy to people, he said.

The Solano County Library's deputy director, Jessica Jupitus, said story hour is a regular event at the library and this one had no added agenda.

"It's a fun thing to do," she said. "We want to encourage people to come in to the library, and for young children age two to five, dress-up is normal imaginative play, so, to see a grown up dressed up, is fun."

The library system welcomes all kinds of people for its story hours, she said. "We've had a race car driver, someone dressed as Supergirl, [and] police officers, read stories," she said. "We want the community to know it's for everyone." Reported in: *Vallejo Times-Herald*, June 17, 2019.

## Jacksonville, Florida

"Storybook Pride Prom" at Willowbranch Library in Riverside, scheduled for Friday, June 28, 2019, was cancelled on Monday, June 24, after the library had received hundreds of phone calls supporting and protesting the event.

In a switch from a typical drag queen storytime, in which an adult dressed in drag reads to young children, the Storybook Prom planned to give the hundred teenagers who signed up a chance to dress as their favorite book characters, or in drag, for a night of music, dancing, and costumes.

Chris Boivin, the library's assistant director of community relations and marketing, said the library canceled the event over worries about whether the library could provide enough "safety and security for everybody involved." The library, which hosts other LGBTQ events, did not anticipate the responses to its plans for the Pride Prom, Boivin said.

Prior to the cancellation, Raymond Johnson, founder of Biblical Concepts Ministries in Jacksonville, encouraged people in an email titled "emergency alert" to contact city officials and local pastors and demand the event be canceled.

Also, Elizabeth Johnston, a popular blogger and author who goes by "The Activist Mommy," asked her hundreds of thousands of Facebook followers, a week before the scheduled "Prom," to call Willowbranch and "express your disgust that this perversion is taking place in a taxpayer funded library."

Beatrice Palmer, a local drag performer who had planned to make an appearance at the Storybook Prom, said that she does not believe security was a real issue for the event.

JASMYN, a nonprofit organization for LGBTQ youth, has hosted similar



prom events for the last decade without issues, Palmer said.

“You know how to keep one hundred people in your library safe,” Palmer said. “It is possible to keep on hundred kids safe in a library. But when it’s gay children, it becomes a problem.”

When the *Florida Times-Union* asked the library to comment, Boivin said “The primary component, the real intention . . . was to make it a prom, and to make it something where kids could discover the library in a way they may not have before. But in the end,” Boivin added, “the environment may have been too tumultuous for us to provide the kind of event that we wanted to provide.”

Boivin said there has not been a plan to reschedule the event within the library. Reported in: *Florida Times-Union*, June 25, 2019.

## Alpharetta and Atlanta, Georgia

The Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System removed a “Drag Queen Story Time” from its online calendar of events, cancelling without explanation the event that had been scheduled for April 6, 2019. It allowed the metro Atlanta drag queen Steven Igarashi-Ball, who performs in drag mostly for charity as Miss Terra Cotta Sugarbaker, to reschedule it for April 27 at the library system’s Alpharetta branch—but without any promotion by the library, nor by the county that funds the library. Other storytime events remain on the library system’s public calendar.

When the event was rescheduled, Igarashi-Ball said, the 180 spaces filled in less than an hour.

After the county library system declined to endorse the event, Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms invited the drag queen to read to children at city hall.

“Miss Terra Cotta Sugarbaker and all of our LGBTQ friends are always welcome at Atlanta City Hall. How about we host your next story hour? @CityofAtlanta—let’s make it happen! #OneAtlanta,” Bottoms tweeted on March 29.

Igarashi-Ball, who had been involved in such events at the library system’s Ponce de Leon Avenue branch since September 2017, said he received an email in early March from Claudia Strange, who handles marketing and public relations for the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System.

“I was told that the event was being cancelled by the county and not by the library, and they said that it was above the library’s decision,” Igarashi-Ball said. “I was told that all of the libraries support the event and wanted it to continue, but that the county had say over them and that the county was cancelling it.”

The event in Alpharetta was to be the library system’s first drag queen storytime at a suburban branch, outside of the Atlanta city perimeter.

When asked by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, neither library nor county officials explained why the event was dropped from the calendar.

Jessica Corbitt-Dominguez, a spokesperson for the library system (which includes the Alpharetta and Ponce de Leon libraries), sent the *Journal-Constitution* a statement similar to the one she gave Atlanta LGBTQ magazine *Project Q Atlanta*, which first reported the story: “We appreciate the community support for the Drag Queen Story Time event, which has been successful and well received at the Ponce de Leon Library. We recommended to the organizer that it continue at the location where it has a strong track record. . . . Not every program is offered at every location.”

Igarashi-Ball, who doesn’t perform in clubs, isn’t sure why his clean and

humorous act wasn’t welcomed for the children of Alpharetta as it has been in Atlanta, especially when the branch invited him.

He said he has a right to know who is taking issue with him so he can properly defend himself. “By not being provided an answer, it feels like discrimination and it feels like people are afraid of the event, which feels like homophobia.”

He told *Project Q Atlanta*, “If they’re going to censor my event, what event would be next? I feel like libraries have to be safe spaces and bastions of freedom of speech, and I feel like this goes against all of that.” Reported in: *Project Q Atlanta*, March 27, 2019; *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 1; *The Hill*, April 4.

## Rockford, Illinois

Rockford Public Library’s first Drag Queen Story Hour, featuring entertainer Cass Downing—a transgender woman dressed in drag, whose stage name is Cass Marie Domino—attracted dozens of parents and their small children to the library’s East Branch on June 22, 2019, for stories and songs celebrating diversity and inclusion.

Outside the library, well over one hundred protesters lined East State Street, reciting prayers and carrying signs condemning the event. A smaller but vocal contingent of counter-protesters were also on hand, to support the Drag Queen Story Hour.

Several police officers, including Chief Dan O’Shea, maintained order in the parking lot as the two groups occasionally shouted insults at each other.

Downing, dressed as an “ice queen” in a powder blue floor-length, beaded dress with a matching crown, read books including *What’s the Difference? Being Different is Amazing* by



Doyin Richards, and *It's Okay to Be Different* by Todd Parr.

Rockford Public Library Executive Director Lynn Stainbrook was undaunted by the large group of protesters.

“We are living in a more diverse society than ever before,” Stainbrook said. “Our children, my grandchildren are going to work side-by-side with people that fall into the LGBTQ community. They need to learn tolerance and acceptance at a very early age. They will be living and working and playing aside people of this community and we need to accept that and celebrate it.”

Paul Logli, president of the library board of trustees, said he and other board members at first were “uncertain about the program.” Trustees learned in May about the story hour that was scheduled by staff.

“The title gets your attention,” Logli said. “But when staff explained to some of us, many—including myself—became more comfortable.”

Logli said some residents and patrons contacted board and staff members not only about the story hour, but also about Queer Prom two weeks earlier at the Nordlof Center, which the library owns and operates. It was for teens ages thirteen to eighteen years old. The event was funded by the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois.

The events at the library are tied into LGBTQ Pride Month. Mayor Tom McNamara made the city’s observance of the national pride month official with a proclamation.

Sandi Ware, a Rockford parent of two preschoolers, raised objections before the storytime. “A big, hairy man scantily dressed as a woman promoting homosexuality and gender confusion . . . is inappropriate for this age group,” Ware said. The drag

queen storytime was meant for children ages three to five.

Ware said she objects to the library “using our tax dollars . . . to promote gender confusion as normal and desirable.”

Logli said, however, that laws and policy would not deny use of the library “based solely or primarily on the sexual orientation or identification of the participants.” The library designated a room separate from the children’s area with its own door, so no child or adult will “stumble” into an event they don’t want to attend, Logli said.

“Attendees of Drag Queen Story Hour are citizens and taxpayers who have freely and intentionally chosen to participate and are equally entitled to access publicly funded facilities and programs of their choosing,” Logli said. Reported in: *Rockford Register Star*, June 4, June 22, 2019.

### Evansville, Indiana

Nearly a month after the original event was over, Drag Queen Story Hour remained a hot topic at the board meeting of Evansville Public Library on March 14, 2019.

“The stench of Drag Queen Story Hour intentionally sowing gender confusion in our littlest children still befouls our community,” one speaker said at the meeting.

“Jesus has given us a choice, why would we think we can’t give people a choice? As library board members, remember you represent all the citizens and not just a few,” said another.

A third speaker questioned how much security for the event cost the city. Afterwards, the Evansville Police Department told Eyewitness News that police overtime cost just under \$5,500 for the event.

The meeting ended almost identically to the last board meeting, which took place days before Drag Queen

Story Hour—with a motion: “That EVPL withdraw personnel, direct support, marketing and promotion of the Drag Queen Story Hour future events.”

The board member who made that motion, Richard Clements, is the same one who proposed it in February. No other board member seconded that motion.

At the March meeting, the board did not discuss whether another Drag Queen Story Hour is in Evansville’s future. Reported in: *TristateHomepage.com*. March 14, 2019.

### Lawrence, Kansas

The Lawrence Public Library went ahead with its “Reading Rainbow Storytime with Deja Brooks” event on June 22, 2019, despite a threatening message about the event posted on 4chan the day before.

The threatening message did not include the names of anyone specific, but called for protest and referred to the Reading Rainbow Storytime.

The library had announced the event with this summary:

Join our host Deja Brooks as she reads and performs stories embracing our local LGBT community and celebrating families of all kinds! Deja’s Reading Rainbow is a storytime about love and friendship, being different and belonging, being unique and being accepted, colors, rainbows, and, of course, fun!

The library asked that a Lawrence Police Department officer be present during the event in order to support library security staff. In a public statement before the event, library administrators said they “will continue to work together with the FBI and the Lawrence Police Department to keep informed of any further



developments, and will communicate them publicly if more information becomes available.”

The library posted the following tweet after the event: “Thank you, @LawrenceKS\_PD for being with us today, and @MrDejaBrooks for bringing hundreds of people out for your Reading Rainbow Storytime.” Reported in: KCTV-5 News, June 22, 2019.

### Wichita, Kansas

Protests continued for months after the Wichita Public Library hosted “Say YAAAS to Reading,” an event that featured drag queens reading picture books in a private conference room at the downtown library on September 25, 2018.

Taking action on the controversy nearly half a year later, on March 19, 2019, the Wichita library board of directors approved a new programming policy that states the library’s commitment to “free and open access to information and ideas for all users.” The proposed policy appears to leave the door open for future drag queen events, though none are scheduled.

The storytime in September drew about 220 people to the downtown library, including families with young children, even though it had been advertised as an adult event. It also drew protests—on the evening of the event as well as during the weeks and months to follow.

The new policy, inspired by the American Library Association’s “Library Bill of Rights,” stresses the library’s role as a forum for intellectual freedom, where a wide spectrum of thoughts and ideas are welcome. It further notes that library programs, like library materials, should not be censored just because some customers might disagree with them.

“Decisions to provide programs will not be made on the basis of any

anticipated approval or disapproval,” Wichita’s policy states, “but solely on the merits of the program in serving the interests of Library customers.”

The guidelines go on to say, “Performers and presenters will not be excluded from consideration because of their origin, background or views, or because of possible controversy.” Reported in: *Wichita Eagle*, March 14, 2019, March 21.

### Louisville, Kentucky

A Drag Queen Storytime at the Louisville Main Library in March 2019 was cancelled, but another one was held about two months later, on May 18.

The library never gave a reason for cancelling the March event, which was planned to feature the Derby Sisters.

The May event featured local entertainer Vanessa Demornay reading about to 200 families. The books she chose, *My Princess Boy* and *Not Every Princess Wears Pink*, center around being yourself and ignoring what society says you should be, according to Demornay.

Demonstrators, previously reported as being with the American Family Association, didn’t want the rescheduled Drag Queen Storytime to happen. To show their objection to the event, several stood just down the stairs, coming face-to-face with counter-protesters. Homemade signs suggested kids shouldn’t be exposed to the lifestyle.

“We were expecting that there would be a large and enthusiastic crowd for it. Turns out, we were correct,” said Lee Burchfield, director of the Louisville Free Public Library. “The Louisville community is very diverse. The public library’s mission is to provide the broadest possible range of information and ideas to the community, so we really strive to offer

something for everybody. I think this was an important step for us.”

The library hopes to be an example of compassion, encouraging protesters and counter-protesters alike to discuss their views respectfully. “What the library hopes is that one day the library can be the marketplace of ideas, where instead of shouting at each other, they actually sit down and talk to one another,” Burchfield said. Reported in: WAVE 3 News, May 18, 2019.

### Annapolis, Maryland

Two sessions of a Drag Queen Story Time at the Severna Park Community Library in Annapolis drew toddlers and parents, plus protesters, on June 29, 2019. About one week earlier, the board that oversees libraries in Annapolis, the Anne Arundel County Public Libraries (AACPL) Board of Trustees, had changed a programming policy to give library staff more autonomy in planning such events.

The June drag queen events were on the same day as Annapolis celebrated the city’s first LGBTQ pride parade.

At the day’s first storytime, at 1 p.m., about thirty protesters prayed and talked peacefully on the road outside of the library, according to AACPL spokesperson Christine Feldmann. Feldmann said the group had signs that said drag queens are dangerous for children and gender fluidity is not real.

At the 3 p.m. session, two protesters went inside, where about 165 toddlers and parents were attending the storytime. Feldmann said the two began shouting at the performer, Matthew Maisano, who performs as Balena Canto. Maisano said he was halfway through reading *Be Who You Are* when one of the men started shouting, “This is corrupting your children,” and “This isn’t right.”



Feldmann said the men were removed by police after one of them shoved library board member Rob Sapp, who asked them to be quiet. “The customers cheered when they were removed and the storytime continued,” Feldmann said. “Lots of happy families.”

Sapp said he plans to press charges, and he saw police arrest the man who pushed him. “I wanted to get between him and the kids,” Sapp said.

Both Feldmann and Maisano said the incident lasted less than a minute.

Previously, after a Drag Queen Story Time at another library in Anne Arundel County, the AACPL voted in December 2019 to give itself the power to vote on whether “controversial” programs should be approved. [See JIFP *Spring 2019*, page 68.] Many of the programs deemed “controversial” included LGBTQ content.

On June 20, the board unanimously voted to adopt a revised version of the policy that no longer gives the board voting power or calls for programs to be flagged as “potentially controversial,” and instead asks Libraries CEO Skip Auld to notify the board of any programs that “merit their special attention.” Reported in: *Capitol Gazette*, June 20, 2019, June 29.

### Lexington Park, Maryland

On June 23, 2019, Drag Queen Story Hour drew more than one hundred attendees to the public library in Lexington Park, Maryland. Supporters and protesters picketed and prayed outside the Lexington Park library as children listened to stories read by the performers, crafted paper crowns, and had their faces painted. One protester was arrested for allegedly disrupting the event.

The Southern Maryland Area Secular Humanists and PFLAG [Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays] Leonardtown, the nonprofit groups

that organized the story hour, rented a library room to host two male performance artists dressed in theatrical women’s clothing.

Ashley Kyle Morgan, a forty-two-year-old Leonardtown resident, was apprehended by St. Mary’s sheriff’s deputies after he was observed running into the meeting room just as the event was beginning. He told the children present, “Do not believe these lies” told by “men in dresses.” This prompted discord as parents tried to calm children, some of whom were crying.

Morgan has been charged on five misdemeanor counts of disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, failure to obey a reasonable/lawful order, resisting arrest, and trespassing at a public agency, according to court records.

“It’s a private event, you have to be registered to do it. Obviously, you can’t cause a disturbance to prevent what’s going on in the room, which is what happened,” sheriff’s Captain Steven Hall, commander of the agency’s special operations division, said at the library.

After the arrest, the story hour commenced, with performers Nicholas Hebb, who goes by Angelica Lize, and Stormy Vain, who declined to provide his real name, reading books such as *Free To Be Incredible Me* by local author Joelle-Elizabeth Retener, *This Day in June* by Gayle Pitman, and *Neither* by Arlie Anderson.

As the event carried on, picketers stood on either side of the library, separated by police tape. Protesters displayed signs, some of which declared “God has something better for you,” while a few others espoused homophobic rhetoric.

Protesters outside peacefully held a prayer vigil, with no further incidents between the protesters and counter-protesters. Jeremy Linehan, who

joined the vigil, said he was there “so that the light of Jesus may shine on those who are lost,” to nods of agreement from those around him.

On the other side, supporters of the event blew bubbles, played the Beatles and Elton John, and held up colorful signage stating “Men in dresses telling stories is the foundation of Christianity,” and other messages of support for the LGBTQ community. Reported in: *The Enterprise/SoMDNews.com*, June 26, 2019.

### Fall River, Massachusetts

Hundreds of supporters and families with children turned out to the first-ever Drag Queen Storytime at the Fall River Public Library on June 1, 2019, an event to kick off June as Pride Month in the town’s LGBTQ community.

Library-goers filled the meeting room and hallway and spilled out the door. In order to accommodate everyone, drag queen Naomi Chomsky offered three separate readings to allow everyone to participate.

Opposition came from the Massachusetts Family Institute, a non-profit Christian organization based in Worcester, represented by local members of the Baptist Temple Church and its pastor Michael Johnson.

Before storytime, Chomsky told the press, “Today is about the children and celebrating diversity.” She said having inclusive events in bigger cities is important, but it may be even more critical in smaller municipalities like Fall River.

“Gay people live everywhere,” Chomsky said. “You shouldn’t have to move to the big city (to feel included). No matter who you are, you’re somebody who deserves love and respect.”

The Family Institute group outside peacefully protested and prayed. It did not participate in a sit-in to keep



children out of the event room, as had been planned.

Pastor Johnson said the group was not there to hate, but rather open lines of communication with the LGBTQ community to teach them God's way.

"We're trying to bring about a consciousness," Johnson said. "Leave our kids alone if you're going to indoctrinate them that this is an acceptable lifestyle."

A police presence, both uniformed and in plain clothes, was on the scene inside and outside the library. Police Sargent Mike Digagni said it was better to have "too many and not need them, than not enough."

Library Director Liane Verville said she had a lot of support from her Board of Trustees and Mayor Jasiel Correia II in holding the event, despite protesters. Reported in: *Herald News*, June 1, 2019.

### Conway, New Hampshire

An overflow crowd came to the Drag Queen Story Hour for children on Friday's June 28, 2019 at the Conway Public Library.

According to Christopher Bellis, co-chair of White Mountains Pride, which sponsored the event, "We had 90 people (children and parents) at the story hour, with the readers doing two sets of readings, and 40 to 50 people outside who were there to support and maybe 20 who were against."

An overflow reading area for children unable to get into the Drag Queen Story Hour was held by representatives of the Jackson Public Library.

David Smolen, library director at the Conway Public Library, said he was pleased with the Drag Queen Story Hour's reception, despite the protests out front. Ten to twenty protesters against the event were outnumbered by counter-protesters by a

margin of about two to one, according to reporters' estimates.

The White Mountains Pride Committee had hired a police detail, but the officers reported there were no altercations between the two bands of protesters.

Smolen said the story hour "did exactly what organizers said it would" The controversy "was much ado about nothing," said Smolen. "The two readers, Mimi and Kristi, did a great job, reading about inclusiveness and acceptance and diversity and being a good friend."

Smolen said he was proud that the board of trustees upheld the library's principles of free speech with a vision statement promoting open dialogue. "I think the program was consistent with our values as a profession," said Smolen.

Protesters said they did not feel it was proper to expose young children to the potential influence of drag queens.

Prior to the event, Christopher Jay, a lawyer affiliated with the conservative religious non-profit Cornerstone Action, filed a right-to-know request pertaining to Drag Queen Story Hours at the Conway Public Library. He obtained emails in which organizers of the storytimes said they were not teaching about any sort of sex.

Jay disputed that benign interpretation of drag queen storytimes. Cornerstone issued an official comment, saying: "Drag queens are 'adults-only entertainment' and adult-only entertainment should not be mixed with children. Parents have a right to know and to challenge this at their local library." Reported in: *Conway Daily Sun*, June 13; July 1.

### Brooklyn, New York

Two public libraries in Brooklyn held drag queen storytimes in June 2019.

When the Gerritsen Beach Library held its first ever Drag Queen Story Hour on June 6, a cluster of small children sat on the floor transfixed by a lavender-haired drag queen named Angel Elektra, who wore a rainbow-hued sequin sheath and read storybooks aloud to them.

Outside, it was a much different scene.

On one side of blue New York Police Department barricades stood protesters who had papered the neighborhood with fliers condemning the event. They held aloft signs with slogans like "Grinding America Down," and accused the organizers of child abuse.

A few yards away, behind another set of barricades, were counter-demonstrators who showed up to support Drag Queen Story Hour.

Objectors (who mainly took issue with the event's suggested age bracket, zero to five) say the "taxpayer funded attack on our babies" aims to "groom children into the transgender lifestyle."

Planners of the counter-protest had used Facebook to urge people to show that Angel Elektra was welcome in Brooklyn.

Later that month, locals flocked to support a drag queen who read children's books to kids at Brooklyn Public Library's Crown Heights branch on June 27, overwhelming a small group of protesters. Just five people gathered on June 27 to express outrage over Harmonica Sunbeam's presence at "Drag Queen Story Hour," while more than fifty colorfully dressed proponents sang songs and chanted in support of the event.

Police kept the two groups separated.

One protester shouted biblical references into a megaphone to warn of the potential dire consequences of the drag queen's presence.



“God wiped out cities because of this,” said the man who asked only to be identified as Tag. “We’re almost there. It’s getting worse now than it was back then.”

Supporters brushed off the ominous alarms, calling the protesters intolerant and a poor representation of the Crown Heights community.

“We’re here to stand against bigotry in whatever form it takes,” said Alice Tracey. “And look at how much we outnumber them by. I think that tells you all you need to know.”

The protest organizer chalked up the weak attendance to the intolerance of pro-drag queen demonstrators.

“Obviously, we didn’t have the turnout we’d hoped for,” said Rick Knight. “I think that if you express any conservative views, people just jump on you. People are afraid to speak against this.”

Knight suspected that the story hour program was the beginning of an elaborate indoctrination effort on the part of drag queens everywhere.

“They can’t reproduce, so they’re recruiting,” he said. “I’m not a conspiracy theorist, but I think a lot of this ideology is from the cultural Marxists.”

The demonstrators, whom Knight described as fighting a global culture war, were attempting to draw the line before society slid down a “slippery slope,” he said.

“Pedophilia is next,” Knight said. “You have to realize that drag queens were a fringe group just ten years ago, but now they’re mainstream. Next they’ll be defending pedophilia.”

The demonstrations did not interrupt the storytime, where approximately sixty-five kids listened to the guest of honor read a number of children’s books. Reported in: *Reported in: Brooklyn Eagle*, June 6, 2019; *The Daily Beast*, June 7; *Brooklyn Paper*, June 27.

## Astoria, Oregon

When a man showed up at the Astoria Library in February to protest a Drag Queen Story Hour, he had his phone out.

His plan was to provide a running commentary, broadcasting a livestream to his social media followers. His camera, though focused primarily on his own face, turned sometimes to capture the people attending the reading, including parents and their young children.

Jimmy Pearson, the library director, couldn’t do much about filming outside the library, but he drew the line when it came to filming and photographing people inside.

“I take library privacy very seriously,” Pearson said ahead of a Monday night City Council meeting, where he presented an updated set of the library’s standards of conduct.

“Parents have the right to not have their kids videotaped.”

The City Council approved the updated policy, which is not very different from what the library had in place before. It just codifies the rules, Pearson said.

The approval will give the rules a little more heft. Depending on the violation, anyone being disruptive or breaking library rules could be asked to leave for the day or even lose all privileges for up to three years. Reported in: *Daily Astorian*, April 16, 2019.

## Haverford Township, Pennsylvania

Haverford Township Free Library hosted its second annual Drag Queen Storytime in its third year of presenting programming featuring Pride and the LGBTQ community. Almost 500 people came to see the storytime on June 16, 2019, so the library had to add a second performance.

The event also drew hundreds of demonstrators, both in favor of and in opposition to the event. That was quite different from last year’s performance, which went off with no crowds outside. This year, township police closed the street to traffic in advance, and placed jersey barriers to keep the two factions separated from each other, as well as to provide a means of access for the families attending the event.

The reader was Matthew Maisano, a drag performer playing Ms. Balena Canto, dressed in a white pantsuit, glittery fuchsia stilettos, with eye shadow to match, plus a bejeweled necklace, bracelets, and earrings and flowers in her blond swept-up hair. For both performances, she read three books, sang songs such as the “Hello Song” and “If You Believe” from *The Wiz*, and did a rendition of the hokey pokey.

Sex was not discussed, and the storytime followed the structure of other storytimes hosted by non-drag queens.

“Today is about democracy,” said Phil Goldsmith, president of the library’s board of trustees. “It’s about people choosing for themselves what they want their children to see and be exposed to. It’s trying to understand the other side on both sides and hopefully at the end of the day, it’s a joyful day, that the kids have fun.”

Both sides were passionate in their cause and had visual and audible elements to have their message noticed.

On the one side was the opposition with an enormous banner reading, “Dear God: Let NOT the little children be perverted by Drag Queen story hours!” along with a statue of Mary, another banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe, bagpipes playing, and rounds of the Rosary being prayed.

On the other side, there were no shortage of supporters on hand. They



came with bubbles, rainbow flags, whistles, and even a didgeridoo. They also had a large banner, saying, “Welcome Balena Canto,” and drew rainbows on the street with sidewalk chalk.

Jennifer Phillips, interim director of the Swarthmore Public Library, started the event in Haverford three years ago as a way to support LGBTQ youth.

Phillips serves as co-host of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Commission for the Delaware County Library System with Mari Ayala, who said Saturday’s event represented the library’s mission. “The library,” Ayala said, “belongs to everyone.”

A few days before the event, more than 100 residents crowded a Haverford Township Board of Commissioners meeting on June 11 to air their views on whether the drag queen storytime should be held.

Among the opponents was Bill Williams, a physician and resident of Haverford Township, who warned that drag queen storytime “will force children into gender dysmorphia. We must consider the long-term consequences.”

He cited research from the American College of Pediatricians, which is listed by the Southern Poverty Law Center as “a fringe anti-LGBT hate group that masquerades as the premier US association of pediatricians to push anti-LGBT junk science, primarily via far-right conservative media and filing *amicus* briefs in cases related to gay adoption and marriage equality.”

But not all in the crowd were opposed to the event. Attendees wearing “I Support DQSH” stickers could be seen throughout the room.

“I think a lot of the opposition comes from a place of ignorance,” said Maisano, creator of the Balena Canto persona. He told *Philadelphia* magazine, “People who don’t take the time

to understand what Drag Queen Storytime really is about have the idea in their head that it’s a traditional club drag show that can have adult themes. It’s not. The main purpose of this is for kids to be exposed to a positive LGBTQ role model.”

In the end, only one member out of the nine commissioners spoke out in disapproval.

“This isn’t about inclusion and acceptance, this is about our children,” said commissioner James McGarrity. “The library should not have this on Saturday.”

Board commissioner Daniel Siegel fired back: “A cross-dresser reading to our three-year-olds isn’t a threat to our society, but intolerance is.”

“The event will go on as scheduled,” a representative from the library told *Philadelphia* magazine following the meeting. “Some residents assumed that the Board of Commissioners would side with them and put pressure on the library’s board to reconsider, but they failed. I’m happy to see that love trumps hate during Pride month.” Reported in: *Philadelphia Magazine*, June 14, 2019; *Delaware County Daily Times*, June 16.

### Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (CLP) canceled a Drag Queen Story Hour at its Main branch, in the Oakland neighborhood, after threats were made against similar program nationwide. [The same threats also led to cancellation of a program at a Pittsburgh children’s museum—see page 76.]

The final installment of a series in which men in drag read stories to children had been scheduled for June 29, 2019, after previous installments of the series had gone off without a hitch. However, Carnegie Library spokesperson Suzanne Thinnes said, the library decided to “err on the side of safety.” She did not mention any

specific threats or where they purportedly came from.

Thinnes said, “We are very proud to offer this program and we fully intend on bringing it back next season.”

The library issued the following statement: “Due to unforeseen circumstances beyond our control, Drag Queen Story Hour will not be presented this Saturday, June 29, at CLP-Main. CLP is proud to join other libraries around the country to offer programming to families that explores diversity and encourages empathy, kindness and understanding.”

Sue Kerr, an LGBTQ activist, blogger and *Pittsburgh Current* columnist, said that while she understands that safety should be a primary concern, extra measures could have been taken by consulting with police to make the program safer, and let it go on as planned.

“Let’s make the event safer,” Kerr says. “I worry about what kind of message we are sending to the LGBTQ community, especially our children, when we give in to these kinds of threats.”

She added, “What makes the decision even harder to take is that this all happened on the last weekend of Pride Month and the weekend set to mark the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots. I think more should have been done before there was a cancellation.” Reported in: *Pittsburgh Current*, June 29, 2019; *Inquisitr*, June 30.

### Bristol, Rhode Island

The Rogers Free Library in Bristol, Rhode Island, cancelled a drag queen storytime originally scheduled for May 2019, after the library director cited “threats of protests.” The event was rescheduled for June 15.

A full house came out for the reading, with people spilling out of the room, as drag queen Naomi Chomski





read two picture books to children. The children had been invited to come in their favorite dress-up clothes and create their own crowns.

Swarms of people for and against drag queen story hour protested outside the library.

The library claims its mission includes the free exchange of diverse ideas, but that “sometimes it is challenging to get this balance just right,” the library said in a statement.

The event was co-sponsored by F.R. Pride as part of Pride Month. Reported in: WJAR/Turn to 10 TV News, May 31, 2019; June 4; WLNE ABC6 TV, June 15.

### Greenville County, South Carolina

A Drag Queen Story Hour on February 17, 2019, at the Five Forks branch of the Greenville County Library System in South Carolina may have been connected to the subsequent departure of the branch manager and the managers of two other branches in the library system.

The Drag Queen Story Hour was held by Mom’s Liberal Happy Hour SC, which said on Facebook that the event was designed to expose children “to all the different kinds of beautiful people in the world,” in an effort to allow them to “become more kind, confident, and tolerant individuals.”

There was a protest, but the event went off as planned, with the aid of the Greenville County Sheriff’s Office, which provided security at the Five Forks library, according to WHNS.

Prior to the event, the library issued a statement saying the Drag Queen Story Hour is “in accordance with the library’s policy on use of meeting spaces but is not being sponsored or promoted by the library system,” *The State* reported.

Jonathan Newton, the manager of the South Carolina library that held the event, is no longer employed at the branch, according to officials.

There is no word if Newton’s departure was the result of the Drag Queen Story Hour.

A longtime employee of the Greenville County Library System, Newton posted on Facebook on March 19 that he left his job as branch manager of the Five Forks library.

Newton did not indicate if he resigned or was fired, but his departure was confirmed by Beverly James, the library system’s executive director, the *Greenville News* reported. James gave no further information, telling the newspaper, “We don’t discuss personnel matters.”

Newton said “he has been advised not to make a statement about what led to the change in his employment status at this time,” according to WHNS.

He is not the only branch manager to leave the Greenville County system in the wake of the drag queen event.

The manager of the Pelham Road branch, Julie Phillips, said as of March 18 she is a “former employee” of the Greenville County system, the *Greenville News* reported. James confirmed that Phillips no longer worked there.

Another branch manager, in Simpsonville, Lina Bertinelli, posted about her resignation on Facebook. She planned to step down in April. She posted that “it has become increasingly obvious that GCLS is not the right fit for me . . . I am devastated by what has happened to my colleagues this week (they are a large part of why I have been here as long as I have) and I am honored to be in their company, but my resignation was put into motion before their news broke.” Reported in: *Greenville News*, March 21, 2019; *Charlotte Observer*, March 24.

### Austin, Texas

A drag queen storytime at the Old Quarry branch of the Austin Public Library on June 5, 2019, was disrupted by a representative of InfoWars, who crashed the event and filmed it.

He approached the performer, local drag queen Miss Kitty Litter ATX, who has been donating her time to the library’s story hour in connection with Austin International Drag Foundation for almost a year. The man claimed to be a “documentary filmmaker” who was “trying to protect the kids.” He asked library staff if a background check had been performed. As a staffer tried to explain APL policy, the man returned his focus to Kitty, demanding: “What’s your official name? Like what is your actual name? If people wanted to do a background check.”

David Richardson, who plays Miss Kitty, told the *Austin Chronicle* that he gave the man his name because he was “trying to be polite and nonconfrontational; I was nice to him. But I thought about it later. . . . It could have been a very dangerous situation.”

Within two days, hundreds of comments—many of which threaten violence and employ anti-LGBTQ hate speech—have been added to the InfoWars video post, which includes Richardson’s full name. Richardson called these comments that “really, really frightening.”

Austin Public Library staff quickly came to Richardson’s aid and asked the man to leave when he became disruptive.

Spokesperson Rachel Nguyen says the library doesn’t plan on doing much differently going forward, though Richardson has decided to sit out the next event. “We try to appease our audiences, and we are inclusive and excited to have all types of performers,” explained Nguyen.



As for “protecting the kids,” Nguyen said all Austin Public Library storytimes are run by librarian staff, who must be present for all youth events; guardians are also required to accompany all children under ten. As a guest performer, a background check on Richardson was not performed, nor felt to be needed.

Because the library is public property, personal filming and photography are allowed, but commercial filming or photography must be approved in advance by the administration. According to Nguyen, the library considers this an instance of commercial filming, “as it was used by an entertainment company for commercial purposes.” She also confirmed that InfoWars did not contact the library for approval, none was given, and the man filming failed to identify himself as a representative of the propaganda site.

Richardson said the goal of the storytime events is to teach kids about diversity and inclusivity. “You could replace ‘drag queen’ with ‘mayor’ or ‘waitress’ or ‘construction worker,’” he said. “What this does is give kids a different perspective on different people. We’re not teaching kids to be drag queens or LGBTQ, but saying if you were that it’s OK, or if one of your friends is gay—that’s OK, too.” Reported in: *Austin Chronicle*, June 14, 2019.

### Houston, Texas

Houston Public Library officials announced on March 22, 2019, that they intend to bring back the city’s Drag Queen Storytime program this summer. Earlier in March, the program was suspended over news reports that one volunteer participant was a registered sex offender who had not gone through a background check. [See JIFP, *Spring 2019*, page 69.]

“HPL is taking this time to reorganize the program, improve upon policies and procedures and to explore other collaborative partnership opportunities,” the library said in a statement.

The library has apologized for the incident. Reported in: *Houston Chronicle*, March 22, 2019.

### Leander, Texas

A controversial “Pride festival” that was hosted by an LGBTQ-friendly church on June 15, 2019, will be the last drag queen storytime at the Leander Public Library, under a new meeting room policy approved by the Leander City Council on August 15.

National attention came to Leander, a city of 56,000 about thirty miles north of Austin, over its plans for a Drag Queen Story Time in the library. In late May, the city of Leander canceled the prior plans for the event, following much social media attention, plus protests, and calls to the library and members of the city council. (Leander Public Library programming is managed by Library Systems and Services, a contracted partner with the City of Leander. This gives the city government final say over programming at the library.)

Open Cathedral Church then stepped in to host a new version the storytime and renamed it “Leander Family Pride Festival and Story Time.”

Ryan Hart, the minister and founder of Open Cathedral, said in a telephone interview that the church was surprised by the reaction to the event. Some two thousand people flooded the website to express interest in the event, which was by RSVP only, he said. The library conference room booked by the church holds about 150 people.

Aside from the part of the library that was rented to the church, the rest

of the facility was closed to the public that day, and the city had a large police presence during the event, out of public safety concerns.

A crowd of more than two hundred supporters and protesters, some yelling over loudspeakers and others banging drums, gathered outside on that Saturday afternoon, June 15. The two sides were separated by small gates.

Inside, Leander City Council member Christine Sederquist and two mothers read books about non-traditional families and accepting differences: *Love Makes a Family* by Sophie Beer; *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell, and Henry Cole; and *Red: A Crayon’s Story* by Michael Hall. The drag queen who had been scheduled to read to children was unable to attend because of “an unavoidable work commitment,” Pastor Hart wrote on the event’s Facebook page.

Afterwards, the library stopped renting meeting space for two months while it reviewed its policy.

The Leander City Council’s August decision, in a 5–2 vote, was to limit the use of library meeting rooms to city-use only. The rooms are no longer available for private rental.

Sederquist, who voted against the new policy, said the rooms should remain available to rent since there is a lack of meeting space in the community. The policy affects more than LGBTQ-friendly events. In the last year, local groups using the library rooms included local homeowners associations, Eagle Scouts, the San Gabriel chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Pathway Bible Church and more, according to city documents.

Mayor Troy Hill said he does not think it makes economic sense for the city to keep the rooms open for rental. “I look at it as simple math: We brought in \$1,800 in rental fees



and we spent \$20,000 in security,” Hill said. “That’s not good math to me.” Reported in: *Washington Post*, June 11, 2019; *Austin American-Statesman*, June 16; *Hill Country News*, July 5; leandertx.gov, August 12; *Community Impact Newspaper*, August 16.

### Montpelier, Vermont

One month after a conservative Facebook personality Elizabeth Johnston, better known as “the Activist Mommy,” urged her 700,000 followers to try to get a Drag Queen Story Hour cancelled in Montpelier, the story hour went on as planned at the Kellogg-Hubbard Children’s Library on June 13, 2019.

Librarians say they received hundreds of calls from concerned people around the country, but there were no protesters during the event. Library officials, parents, and the drag queens all say the turnout is a reflection of Vermont’s dedication to inclusivity.

More than 130 Vermonters packed the library to see local drag queen duo of Nikki Champagne and Emoji Nightmare. “We’re reading books that are very inclusive and they’re representative of the audience that we’re reading them to,” said Nightmare.

The event drew the highest turnout for the duo since they began doing Drag Queen Story Hour in Vermont.

Carolyn Brennan, co-director of Kellogg-Hubbard Library, said she listened to the bulk of the out-of-state calls, and she stands by her decision to let the show go on.

“Most of it was from a base of just not understanding what Drag Queen Story Hour is,” Brennan said. “We have a variety of different kinds of story hours, and not every program is a good fit for everybody, but hopefully every program is a good fit for someone.”

Prior to the event, City Councilor Jack McCullough received an email from a local resident complaining that the program was inappropriate and asking for it to be cancelled.

McCullough’s email response said the Kellogg-Hubbard Library is a nonprofit, and the city had no control over its operations or programs.

“It would be inimical to all the values of our free society and our constitutional system of government for any government entity to attempt to censor the activities or programs of a public library,” McCullough wrote. “What you propose is a restriction of speech based on the content of that speech. Any such attempt would violate the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and Article 13 of the Vermont Constitution.”

McCullough also said state statute prohibited discrimination in any place of public accommodation based on sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity. He noted that the library has a background check process for volunteers. Reported in: *Barre-Montpelier Time-Argus*, June 24, 2019; WCAX, July 13, July 14.

### Des Moines, Washington

On June 17, 2019, more than two hundred parents and children attended the first Drag Queen Story Hour ever held at the public library in Des Moines, Washington.

There were also protesters in the library’s entryway, but they were in the minority.

“I would say that more overwhelming is the response from the LBGTQ community, and as you see today, the hundreds of parents that were here with their children. If anything, they have rallied more than the opposition has,” said Julie Acteson, director of community relations for the King County Library System.

The event’s performer, whose stage name is Cookie Couture, read *Neither* by Airlie Anderson, a picture book about an egg that hatches into an animal that doesn’t match the others.

“The core of it is all about celebrating what makes us different,” Couture said.

The program was organized by local librarians.

One of the protesters, Chris Blough of Tacoma, said, “I don’t want my tax dollars going to this.” He continued, “Why impose this lifestyle on a child? Children will grow up and learn their own opinions all by themselves. There is no reason for this.”

King County Councilmember Dave Upthegrove disagreed. “Libraries have always been a bastion of free expression and I am proud that the King County Library System remains a safe and welcoming space for everyone,” Upthegrove said. Reported in: King5 TV news, June 17, 2019.

### Renton, Washington

A Drag Queen Story Hour drew dozens of protesters, hundreds of supporters, and more than a hundred attendees to Fairwood Library, a small library outside of Renton, on June 27, 2019. The event was the final of four drag queen storytimes hosted during this year’s Pride Month by King County libraries.

The protesters included members of the paramilitary militia the Three Percenters (many of whom were openly carrying pistols), plus members of the far-right street fighting group known as the Proud Boys, and the right-wing local media outlet Operation Cold Front.

Supporters formed human barriers allowing attendees to enter the library without confronting the protesters. Groups in support of the event included the King County Democrats, local chapters of Indivisible, and



the Puget Sound John Brown Gun Club. They cheered as families with children ranging in age from toddlers to middle schoolers walked into the building to hear drag queen Thadayus read a story about a mermaid.

A member of the Three Percenters, who only shared his first name, Greg, said that residents opposed to the event were worried about antifascist organizers showing up. He said local residents asked his organization to provide security.

Julie Acteson, community relations director of the King County Library System, said that allowing free expression of every opinion is important to the library system. But, she added, the views expressed at Fairwood did not hold equal amounts of support.

“We certainly respect the right of anyone to come out and exercise their right to [freely express themselves]. At the Fairwood event last evening, overwhelmingly, the community turned out in favor of the storytime,” Acteson said. “I think there was about five hundred people there, and easily four hundred were supporters of us holding the event.”

Though the opposing views were contentious regarding the Drag Queen Story Hour, the library system will continue supporting diversity, Acteson said.

“Libraries are about diversity and inclusion. Those are huge values for us, so we want to make sure that we’re offering programs and services meeting the needs of our communities, and not just a chosen few,” she said. “We certainly don’t want to ever be trying to censor what we’re doing—whether it’s in our programs or our selections.”

Acteson could not say if the library system would hold the same series of events next year because the library system has not yet discussed program planning for 2020. Reported

in: *Snoqualmie Valley Record*, June 28, 2019.

### Spokane, Washington

The Spokane Public Library held two Drag Queen Story Hours during Gay Pride Month in June 2019.

At the South Hill branch library, hundreds of people gathered on Saturday, June 15, for an event which included drag queen Nova Kaine.

A week later, at the Downtown branch, about 150 protesters and some 300 counter-protesters gathered outside on Saturday, June 22, while drag queen Tirrany Hex was inside, reading *Not All Princesses Wear Pink* and other books to about 275 people, including parents and children.

At the South Hill branch, the protesters’ side of the street was filled with prayers and singing and signs that read “Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” At the Downtown branch, some used megaphones and signs to demonstrate their concern about the drag queens and the library supporting the reading hour.

Anna Vohach, who created a group called 500 Moms Strong and believes drag has no place at the Spokane Public Library, protested at both events. Vohach said drag mocks women in a repulsive way and is offensive to the gay community.

The supporters of the Drag Queen Story Hour at South Hill tried to present a more positive image. “On this side, everyone is having fun, the children are laughing. We have balloons and face painting. It’s about love and support and access to public,” drag queen Nova Kaine said.

Kaine argued that drag queens are performance artists and they were here to be educational and entertaining, not warp the minds of children. “If you don’t like it, choose not to go, but don’t stand and protest against something that you don’t

understand, obviously don’t understand, with hate speech and bigotry,” Kaine concluded.

Jason Johnson, public engagement manager for the downtown Spokane Public Library, said the library has no current plans to host another drag queen reading event, but the library would likely accommodate if it got another proposal. “It’s a valuable program, and we’ll continue to do it,” he said. Reported in: KXLY4 TV News, June 11, 2019; KHQ6 TV News, June 14, June 15; *Spokesman-Review*, June 24, June 29.

### COMMUNITY CENTERS AND MUSEUMS Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh cancelled a drag queen storytime that had been scheduled for June 28, 2019, on short notice, at the same time as another Pittsburgh institution, the Carnegie Library, cancelled its own drag queen storytime, scheduled for June 29. [See page 72.] Both cited “circumstances beyond our control” on Facebook pages for each event.

The Carnegie Library was more forthcoming about the reason for the cancellation, citing a threat posted to social media that alluded to drag queen storytime programs, but which did not specify any particular program.

Suzanne Thinnies, a spokesperson for Carnegie Library, said staff at the Children’s Museum alerted library officials to the online threat, and the two organizations discussed the cancellations.

Representatives for the Children’s Museum and Pittsburgh police could not immediately be reached by reporters seeking more information about the cancellation. Reported in: *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 29, 2019; [triblive.com](http://triblive.com), July 1.



## Milwaukee, Wisconsin

At Bay View Community Center (BVCC) in Milwaukee on May 4, 2019, Drag Queen Story Hour MKE presented a Drag Queen Story Hour with a *Star Wars* theme, “May the Fierce Be with You.”

It featured *Star Wars*-related titles, including a comic book and two picture books aimed at children ages two to eight: *Goodnight Darth Vader* by Jeffrey Brown, *Star Wars Search Your Feelings* by Calliope Glass and Caitlin Kennedy, and the Little Golden Book *I Am a Hero (Star Wars)*.

Members of the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property protested outside. They oppose homosexuality and believe drag queen storytimes groom children to accept non-traditional gender roles. They were countered by a group of young people and adults who gathered to demonstrate their support for the LGBTQ community.

Cassie Capriotti, BVCC’s program director, said 17 children attended the storytime.

Mike Mortell, the recently appointed BVCC president and CEO, said that the Drag Queen Story Hour was the first time such event was held at the center. “I was surprised there were protesters in this day and age,” he said. “It underscores a need for inclusion.” Reported in: *Bay View Compass*, May 4, 2019.

## BOOKSTORES AND OTHER STORES Denver, Colorado

The BookBar bookstore in Denver suffered vandalism before and during a reading it hosted by drag queen Miss Shirley Delta Blow on June 27, 2019.

The day before the event, the store was tagged with stickers from a hate group. The *Denver Post* said it is not naming the group, in order to avoid giving it unnecessary attention.

Channel 9 News, the local NBC affiliate, identified the group as the Patriot Front, and said it “is classified as a white nationalist hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.”

Despite the hateful stickers, BookBar owner Nicole Sullivan never considered nixing the drag queen reading, an event designed to celebrate LGBT Pride Month.

“I didn’t think about canceling the event, because then where do you draw the line as a business?” she said. “You have one person trying to intimidate, but you have an event you feel strongly about doing and a community that is coming out to support you.”

During the event, a man in a black T-shirt and black mask sprinted up to the window and spray-painted the storefront. Two people inside, along with police officers stationed nearby, chased the man, eventually catching him in an alley. Samuel Cordova, twenty years old, was arrested for investigation of a bias-motivated crime with property damage, said Christine Downs, a Denver police spokesperson.

Blow’s reading list, selected in light of pride month, included *It’s Okay to Be Different* by Todd Parr and *Tomorrow I’ll Be Brave* by Jessica Hische. Both books are centered on themes of openness and acceptance. Blow also read *Just Add Glitter* by Angela DiTerlizzi, about a child’s creativity. Reported in: *Denver Post*, June 28, 2019; [www.9news.com](http://www.9news.com), June 28, July 1.

## Waterville, Maine

About fifty people packed the inside of the Children’s Book Cellar on June 1, 2019, as Ophelia, a drag queen from Topsham, Maine, read from two books about inclusion.

Earlier that week, Ellen Richmond, owner of the children’s bookstore, said outrage over the event blew

up on social media, including a post and comments by Waterville Mayor Nick Isgro against the event, and a thread of comments on the Facebook page of Maine Conservative Grassroots.

On the day of the reading, a group called An End to Child Indoctrination at the Cellar Bookstore, protested outside. They said they wanted to spread a message about sparing young children from the confusion of adult gender identity.

A much larger group of more than one hundred people waved LGBTQ flags and carried signs in a counter-protest.

The event had been in the works since before the Waterville City Council passed a resolution during the prior month declaring June 2 “Central Maine Pride Day.” Reported in: *Morning Sentinel*/[centralmaine.com](http://centralmaine.com), June 3, 2019.

## Raleigh, North Carolina

More than one hundred people attended Drag Queen Story Hour—possibly the first such event in Raleigh—in Medicine Mama’s Pharmacy, a store that sells CBD products and products made from hemp (a cannabis plant and variant of marijuana that doesn’t get users high). The event was so successful, organizers said they are considering holding the story hour once a month.

Amazing Grace, whose real name is Travis Lewis, and Satine Allure, whose real name is Jonathan Sanderson, read children’s books that included *The Skin You Live In* by Michael Tyler; *Pink Is For Boys*, by Robb Pearlman, which talks about how colors don’t have genders; *The Wonky Donkey*, by Craig Smith, about a donkey with only three legs; and *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* by Dr. Seuss.



Satine Allure wore a knee-length dress with blue flowers and a tall sparkling crown. Amazing Grace wore a long, golden dress with a shorter crown. Children were invited to make their own crowns.

Organizers were expecting protests after backlash followed their announcement of the Saturday morning show. Some of the commenters on

social media said the event “promotes unnatural vice and moral disorder,” and that it will “destroy children’s innocence in a perverse way,” and it is an “offense against God.”

Jimmie Berry-Terry, one of the store’s owners, said, “They said that this event is done with scantily clad men dressed as women, you know known sex offenders, a lot of untrue

things. They gave our leasing company’s information. . . . They asked for us to be shut down. They obviously wanted the event canceled. They wanted our landlord to evict us.”

In the end, about 25 people gathered outside the store praying, according to a security guard. Reported in: WTVD ABC-11, June 28, 2019; *News & Observer*, June 29.