



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE STRIKES DOWN TENNESSEE'S DRAG BAN AS UNCONSTITUTIONAL VIOLATION OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT

TENNESSEE WAS THE FIRST STATE TO PASS A LAW PROHIBITING DRAG PERFORMANCE, A LAW SUCCESSFULLY BLOCKED FROM EVER GOING INTO EFFECT BECAUSE OF ITS VIOLATION OF FREE SPEECH AND EXPRESSION

GLAAD: *"This ruling is a turning point and we will not go back. Every anti-LGBTQ elected official is on notice that these baseless laws will not stand and that our constitutional freedom of speech and expression protects everyone and propels our culture forward. Congratulations and thank you to Friends of George's and their attorneys for speaking up and fighting for everyone's freedom. Their bravery will inspire many other challenges to discrimination."*

Friends of George's: *"This win represents a triumph over hate. Our first amendment rights were affirmed today as drag artists and makers of theatre. Similar to the countless battles the LGBTQ+ community has faced over the last several decades, our collective success relies upon everyone speaking out and taking a stand against bigotry."*

June 03, 2023 – GLAAD, the world's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) media advocacy organization, and Friends of George's Theatre Company in Memphis, TN, are responding to the ruling of Thomas L. Parker, United States District Judge, striking down Tennessee's ban on drag performance, the first ban of its kind in the nation.

In February 2023, the Tennessee General Assembly passed, and Governor Lee signed into law, a bill targeting drag performance, performers, and venues, making it a criminal offense for a person to perform so-called "adult cabaret entertainment," either on public property or in a location where it could be viewed by a person who is not an adult. The law was set to go into

effect in March. Those found violating the law would face misdemeanor charges, a fine of up to \$2,500, and up to a year in jail. Subsequent violations could face a felony charge, punishable by up to six years in jail.

Friends of George's Theatre Company, a Memphis-based nonprofit that produces and performs original theatrical content featuring drag-centric performances, filed a suit against the state of Tennessee arguing that the law is a violation of the First Amendment rights of drag performers. Judge Parker issued an [immediate temporary restraining order](#).

In the 70-page ruling on June 2, Parker wrote, "...The Adult Entertainment Act ("AEA") is an UNCONSTITUTIONAL restriction on the freedom of speech... The Tennessee General Assembly can certainly use its mandate to pass laws that their communities demand, but that mandate as to speech is limited by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which commands that laws infringing on the Freedom of Speech must be narrow and well-defined. The AEA is neither." Parker found the new law to be substantially overbroad, and that it could be struck down in entirety. Parker is an appointee of former President Donald Trump.

At least 13 other states have considered bills banning drag performances.

From GLAAD President & CEO, Sarah Kate Ellis: *"Tennessee's drag ban is a malignant throwback to a dark and shameful time in our nation's past. Historical wrongs are being reintroduced into our laws, and if not overturned will have negative effects not only on LGBTQ people and drag performers, but on countless businesses, small and large. This year Tennessee has led the way on indefensible and discriminatory anti-LGBTQ legislation, and draconian laws are rightfully being scrutinized. This ruling is a turning point and we will not go back. Every anti-LGBTQ elected official is on notice that these baseless laws will not stand and that our constitutional freedom of speech and expression protects everyone and propels our culture forward. Congratulations and thank you to Friends of George's and their attorneys for speaking up and fighting for everyone's freedom. Their bravery will inspire many other challenges to discrimination."*

From Mark Campbell, aka Camille Collins, resident company member and president of Friends of George's: *"Friends of George's chose to take a stand against bigotry to defend drag artistry and our right to creative expression. The stage should remain a sacred platform where actors and performers can inspire others in a shared space. Our country is built on the bedrock of free speech, and the court affirmed this right through today's decision. We will keep advocating for our fellow drag performers and for the well being of the entire LGBTQ+ community."*

From Friends of George's: *"This win represents a triumph over hate. Our first amendment rights were affirmed today as drag artists and makers of theatre. Similar to the countless battles the LGBTQ+ community has faced over the last several decades, our collective success relies upon everyone speaking out and taking a stand against bigotry. This victory for drag artists in Tennessee would not have happened if not for unwavering allies standing up for us. Friends of George's expresses our heartfelt thanks to our passionate legal team, our longtime fans, and to everyone across the country who heard about our fight and wanted to help. While today is a moment worth celebrating as we kick off Pride month, our work is not finished. As the onslaught of hatred against the LGBTQ+ community continues around the country through the passage of anti-trans, homophobic, and draconian laws that seek to silence expression and identity, we will remain vocal and vigilant. Friends of George's will keep making campy theatre, will keep raising*

money for charitable causes, and will keep advocating for the inclusivity and visibility of the queer community at large.”

Friends of George’s is supported by [The Actors' Equity Association who filed an amicus brief](#), and [The Dramatists Guild](#), awarding Friends of George’s with this year’s [Defender Award](#) for its efforts in support of free expression in the dramatic arts. The Theatre Company was honored by the [Stonewall Inn Gives Back Initiative Annual Pride Reception](#) and performed alongside MUNA, Mariahlynn, Ariel Versace, and other allies at the historic Stonewall Inn on June 1, 2023 to kick off Pride month.

Additional research:

- GLAAD has documented more than [160 threats and attacks against drag performers and venues](#) since early last year.
- Tennessee’s legislature passed [a slate of bills](#) targeting LGBTQ people, youth and families, while passing zero bills to protect against gun violence, the number one cause of death for children and youth in [Tennessee](#) and [nationwide](#).

Please contact GLAAD for images, interviews, or additional information, press@glaad.org.

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About GLAAD: GLAAD rewrites the script for LGBTQ acceptance. As a dynamic media force, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and creates a world where everyone can live the life they love. For more information, please visit www.glaad.org or connect with GLAAD on Facebook and Twitter.

About Friends of George’s Theatre Company: Friends of George’s is a 501(c)(3) non-profit theater company based in Memphis, TN. Its mission is to empower the LGBTQIA+ community by raising the visibility of queer representation on the stage. Every production features the art of drag and benefits a selected local charity that inclusively supports or affirms the LGBTQIA+ population. For more information about Friends of George’s: visit friendsofgeorges.org; follow us on [Facebook](#); Email: info@friendsofgeorges.org