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## **GOP lawmakers should meet drag queens before pursuing hateful legislation**

*Opinion: Before they cry 'sexual perversion,' legislators may want to actually meet and learn about members of our LGBTQ community.*

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The members of Arizona's Senate Republican Caucus have once again proven that their collective approach to lawmaking is grounded solidly in ignorance, arrogance and insecurity.

On June 14, Senate Republicans released a statement informing Arizonans that they are hard at work on new measures to keep our state's children safe.

Are they planning to address the scourge of deadly gun violence that has taken the lives of dozens of schoolchildren around the country? Or to protect the right of a child to terminate a pregnancy that resulted from rape or incest? Or to address childhood nutrition, childhood health or additional funding to reduce class sizes?

No. None of this.

They chose instead to focus on the "real" looming threat to children; a threat that they clearly feel poses greater danger than firearms, incest, malnutrition, health conditions or mental illness.

That's right: Drag queens and story time.

### **The science on gender identity is sound**

In their press release, Senate Republicans decry "sexual perversion" and assert that "Policies of 'nondiscrimination regarding gender expression and sexual orientation' are sending a message to society that we should disregard morals and values just to normalize these unscientific, broad, ill-defined and subjective terms, which set a dangerous precedent for our children that are too young to be exposed to such concepts."

These so-called legislative leaders have chosen to double down on their ignorance, and in their unequalled arrogance, they presume to dictate morality to the rest of us.

However, they are also brazenly lying to their constituents and themselves.

**After other states did it:** Republicans want to ban kids from drag shows

The “unscientific, broad, ill-defined and subjective terms” they describe are anything but. The science is sound, should they choose to review it, let alone accept it.

Leading clinical organizations from the American Medical Association to the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, among others, have all asserted, with scientific basis, that “non-traditional” and “non-binary” gender identities are perfectly normal and acceptable, both clinically and societally, and have no detrimental effect on children.

Writing for Psychology Today in 2019, Dr. Joe Kort, founder of the Center for Relationship and Sexual Health, observed of policymakers seeking to bar events like Drag Queen Story Hour, that “[t]he outrage and fear these opposers demonstrate is unfounded and based largely on hatred of nonconformity (and perhaps unacknowledged fears about their own sexuality).”

## **Still concerned? Spend time with the drag community**

That’s OK. We have a solution.

We would venture to guess that the majority of lawmakers pushing this latest toxic attempt to criminalize things that make them uncomfortable, have never met, interacted with or spent any kind of time with any members of the drag community, queens or kings (or any of the many cisgender performers who fall under the drag umbrella).

As an organization, Phoenix Pride’s ultimate purpose is to create safe spaces. We are experts in that field. And not just spaces that are safe for the LGBTQ+ community, but spaces that are welcoming and accepting of all – LGBTQ+ or not, ally or not.

We embrace the opportunity to interact and forge meaningful conversations in our broader community, even those working to marginalize us or deny our very existence.

So, we would like to extend a public invitation to the members of the Arizona Senate Republican Caucus, and to all elected officials in our state: We will organize an informal opportunity to meet with members of our Arizona drag community to learn who they really

are, what they really do, and to see firsthand that what these entertainers present is neither “wrong” nor “perverse.”

These are just fellow human beings, our family and friends, neighbors and co-workers, teammates and classmates. People.

If our elected leaders expect us to accept their moral superiority and adhere to their definitions of “perversion” and “values” – including deciding for parents what is and is not appropriate for their own children – we believe it is their responsibility to engage in the most minimal amount of firsthand fact-finding before rendering judgment.

We are here and standing by to make that happen.

Sound public policy is the cornerstone of our civilized society. But policy is never sound when it comes from a place of ignorance, arrogance and insecurity.

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