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## BTL Co-Publishers Jan Stevenson, Susan Horowitz Awarded for Activism at Creating Change

## Judge Grants More Time for Settlement in Same-Sex Adoption Case



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National LGBTQ Task Force Deputy Executive Director Kierra Johnson and Executive Director Rea Carey. BTL Photo: Andrew Potter

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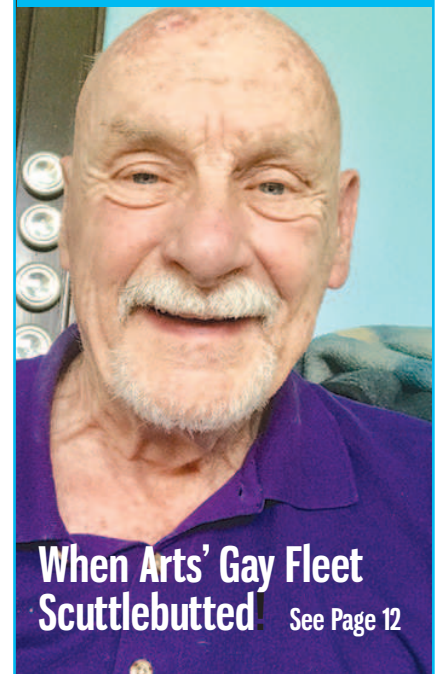
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BTL photos: Jason A. Michael

## Hundreds Show Up to Show Support for Drag Queen Story Time in Huntington Woods

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Despite temperatures topping out in the teens, a crowd of more than 200 came out Saturday to support the Drag Queen Story Time program at the Huntington Woods Public Library. After right wing fringe groups Mass Resistance and Warriors for Christ announced their intention to picket the program, the Metro Detroit Political Action Network and the Motor City Sisters planned a counter-protest.

The original protest was small and only a handful of people – fewer than 10 – appeared to have a problem with the program. Still, armed with a megaphone, they made their position known.

“Drag queens are going to burn in hell for all eternity,” the lone speaker declared early on in the demonstration. “And all of you who condone such things are going to burn in hell.”

The protesters spewed their hate from a position on the sidewalk, while the pro-drag queen crowd, literally separated by a short wall, took over a side parking lot. The crowd split in two when parents began arriving with their children, and literally blocked the protesters from view as the families walked through the parking lot with friendly faces on both sides cheering them on. To drown out the protesters’ message, the counter-demonstrators played “We Are Family” by Sister Sledge, along with the “Barney & Friends” theme song. However, despite even those efforts, the hate messages were impossible to miss and clearly designed to shock.

*“I think Drag Queen Story Time is really good and it also enforces the idea that being different isn’t something to be ashamed of.”*

“Raise your hand if you’re a pedophile,” the man with the megaphone shouted out at one point. “Perverts, indecent perverts, you people need to get right with God. You should be ashamed of yourselves today.”

But no one in the colorful crowd of supporters appeared to be. Instead, they chanted back “love not hate” over and over.

“I think they underestimated this community and its values,” said Ben Falik, who lives in Huntington Woods. “They picked the fight. We didn’t. But you can see by the ratio here today that their megaphone doesn’t really compare to all the diversity and solidarity that we’re seeing here.”

Falik said he strongly supported the program and had taken his daughter to it in the past.

“I think it’s a good program,” he said. “It’s a beautiful thing.”

Eleven-year-old Jacob Apap, who also lives in Huntington Woods, identifies as transgender and, specifically, non-binary. Apap demonstrated with their mother carrying a sign that read, “Put the rainbow in reading.”

“I think they’re so desperate to feel important that they’re willing to disrupt a community that they’re not even a part of,” Apap said. “I think

Drag Queen Story Time is really good and it also enforces the idea that being different isn’t something to be ashamed of.”

Apap’s mother, Deb Kovsky, said their family is Jewish and was just coming from synagogue. “Normally, we would not do this on shabbat,” Kovsky said. “But this is important enough. I didn’t want anyone to see this on the news and not see a huge turnout in support of our kids, our community and this program.”

Jean Harrick and Karen Porter came all the way from Jackson. Both have children who are LGBTQ.

“I’m a mama bear and I’m also a Christian and it upsets me that they are perverting my faith,” Harrick said. “My daughter is LGBT and she was just ordained as a minister. We’re very strong in our faith, but this upsets us that they’ve perverted it into hate.”

Porter said much of the same.

“Children are not born with hate. They are taught hate. So, seeing a drag queen, little kids are probably like, ‘oh cool, sparkles,’” Porter said.

Robert Jay is media director for MDPAN and said everyone has been “spectacular.”

“We were able to get a nice procession going so the parents and the kids didn’t have to come in spitting distance of any of the bigots, and that’s really what we were hoping for, Jay said. We were able to drown out a lot of their hate speech with ‘Barney’ music. So, it was great. This was a huge, huge message that the community sent about how much we value each other.”

Sr. Estee Louder Harder Faster of the Motor

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City Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, the other counter-demonstration co-sponsor, agreed.

“There was way more of us than there was of them,” she said. “I think they got the point and if they didn’t, we’ll be here next time. I think so many people came out because there’s a shift in politics and in society, and people feel like they need to get out and do something to show their support and this is just one way of doing it.”

Inside the library, Raven Divine Cassadine, the drag queen who has been reading to the children since the program first started just over a year ago, estimated there were nearly 50 children with their parents taking part in the program.

“I think that it’s very important that we teach the importance of reading to children and acceptance for everyone regardless of race, sex or gender,” Cassadine said in a statement issued in the days leading up to the program.

Joyce Krom, youth services librarian and Cassadine’s partner in the program, was also quoted in the statement.

“The Huntington Woods Library is proud to offer carefully crafted early literacy programming,” Krom said. “Drag Queen Story Time is just one part of that programming. As we strive to support all children in our community, one of our top priorities is to be welcoming and inclusive, and always toward creating a more equitable society.”

# Michigan Civil Rights Commission to Consider Asking AG's Opinion on LGBTQ Protections

BY BTL STAFF

The Michigan Civil Rights Commission will consider asking Attorney General Dana Nessel to review Attorney General Opinion 7305 during its meeting on Friday, Feb. 1, in Detroit.

The Commission became the first of its kind in the nation in May 2018 to issue an interpretative statement to decide whether laws on prohibiting sex discrimination – such as the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act – also prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, education, housing and real estate as well as use of public accommodations and public service.

This conflicts with former Attorney General Bill Schuette's opinion that state law "prohibits discrimination based on sex, but does not cover distinctions based on sexual orientation or gender identity." Schuette said the Commission's ruling is therefore "invalid."

Yet the Commission ignored Schuette's opinion and directed the Michigan Department of Civil Rights to continue accepting, reviewing and investigating complaints of discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

"The Michigan Civil Rights Commission is an independent, constitutionally created and established body," said Agustin Arbulu, director of the MDCR, in a previous statement. "The Commission is not bound by the opinion of the attorney general. The only recourse is for the courts to determine if issuing the interpretive statement was within the scope of the Commission's authority, and that is the appropriate venue for resolving this issue. Until that time, the department will continue to carry out the directive of the Commission."

MDCR is currently investigating 13 complaints. Of those under investigation, five are related to claims of discrimination based on gender identity

The Commission became the first of its kind in the nation in May 2018 to issue an interpretative statement to decide whether laws on prohibiting sex discrimination – such as the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act – also prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, education, housing and real estate as well as use of public accommodations and public service.

or expression, and eight are related to claims of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Arbulu said, "With a new attorney general, it is important to know where she stands on the authority of the Commission as it was described by AG Opinion 7305. I am eager to hear the Commissioners discussions on this topic."

If asked by the Commission where she stands, Nessel's opinion should come as no surprise. She has made her position clear. When Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive directive on Monday, Jan. 7, to strengthen prohibitions against LGBTQ discrimination in state employment, contracting and provision of services, Nessel issued a statement to the Detroit Free Press which said that "this action is deeply personal to me and I am grateful that Gov. Whitmer has made anti-discrimination one of her top priorities in her first several days in office. This is a step in the right direction and I am hopeful that soon our state laws will also reflect the paradigm of equal protection under the law for all Michiganders."

*The meeting will take place at 2 p.m. at the Detroit Offices of the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, Cadillac Place, 3054 West Grand Boulevard, Suite 3-600, in Detroit. For more information on the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, go to [michigan.gov/mdcr](http://michigan.gov/mdcr).*

## Detroit Man Sentenced to 18-45 Years for Armed Robbery of Trans Woman

BY BTL STAFF

A trans woman in Detroit got justice with help from the Fair Michigan Justice Project. Special Prosecutor Jamie Powell Horowitz prosecuted and secured a conviction against Antoine Simmons in the Wayne County Circuit Court. Judge Mark Slavens sentenced Simmons to 18-45 years in prison on Thursday, Jan. 24, for armed robbery and use of a firearm in connection with a felony.

Simmons, who was carrying a gun, attacked her while she was walking home from a store, according to a Detroit News report. He struck his victim in the

back of the head multiple times and took her purse.

In a statement about the sentence, Fair Michigan President Alanna Maguire said, "Wayne County and the City of Detroit, through its law enforcement officials, the Prosecutor's Office and the Fair Michigan Justice Project, have an effective, focused and tenacious team dedicated to investigating, prosecuting and solving these violent crimes against the LGBTQ community. Mr. Simmons' lengthy prison sentence should serve as a message that criminals can no longer prey upon Detroit's LGBTQ community with impunity."



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# Creating Change: 'Be Unrelenting, Be Bold'

BY KATE OPALEWSKI AND EVE KUCHARSKI

Last Sunday marked the end of The National LGBTQ Task Force's 2019 Creating Change Conference — an annual event attended by thousands, put on to demonstrate advancements in the LGBTQ movement and to facilitate discussions and awareness of marginalized communities. Beyond its national mission, the Washington D.C.-based Task Force purposely holds its event in a different host city each year, having chosen Detroit as its latest location. This year, BTL reporters attended the Conference and though, it was impossible to cover each of the hundreds of combined workshops, plenaries, institutes and sessions, have compiled a report of some of the Conference's highlights and general takeaways.

## The State of the Movement

During the State of the Movement address on Friday, Jan. 25, at the Renaissance Center, National LGBTQ Task Force Executive Director Rea Carey celebrated the 100 historic women in Congress, and the rainbow wave of candidates with over 150 LGBTQ people elected to public office. The LGBTQ community has its first out bisexual U.S. Senator in Kyrsten Sinema, its first out gay man, Jared Polis, as governor in Colorado and the first Native American lesbian in Congress, Sharice Davids.

For this, Carey gave thanks to the voters, the state equality organizations, along with The Victory Fund, the Human Rights Campaign and LPAC for supporting LGBTQ candidates.

"We know of no greater show of strength in this time than the insistence that we are here, we will show up for each other and we will not let that guy in the White House break us down," said Carey, who took the stage with National LGBTQ Task Force Deputy Executive Director Kierra Johnson to inspire the LGBTQ movement to lead in this time.

"This administration, its followers and supporters have unleashed generations of rage. Rage about who holds power in this country. Rage about shutting people out of democracy. But we don't just rage, we're activists after all. We turn that anger, that pain, into action," she said. "We tap into our most energized, strategic selves. We mobilize communities. We fight back and we win."

Carey noted other big wins for the LGBTQ community. In Massachusetts, a historic nearly 70 percent of voters agreed to uphold a state law that forbids discrimination based on gender identity in public places. The state of New York made history also by passing the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act as well as passing legislation to protect LGBTQ youth from the practice of so-called conversion therapy. In Florida, voters approved Amendment 4 in the 2018 midterm elections,



Thousands gathered in Detroit Jan. 23 - 27 for the 31 Annual Creating Change conference held at the Renaissance Center. BTL photo: Andrew Potter

restoring voting rights to more than 1 million people in the state who were previously convicted of felonies.

Johnson emphasized that these actions matter greatly, especially when LGBTQ people are three times as likely to be incarcerated than non-LGBTQ people, and 42 percent of the national population of women in prison identify as lesbian or bisexual.

"We are not in these fights just in solidarity," Johnson said. "Voting rights and criminal justice are LGBTQ issues. And for anyone who still thinks their vote doesn't matter, in just the last few weeks governors from Ohio, Kansas, Wisconsin and right here in Michigan, all signed executive orders banning discrimination against state employees."

But these wins don't come easily or without strife. Carey paused and took a moment to thank transgender leaders, activists and gender nonconforming people specifically who have taken risks and told their stories to help make this progress happen.

"This movement hasn't always been supportive and sometimes worked against you. Sometimes lesbian, gay and bisexual people have and still do question your equality as transgender people. It is bad enough that you have to face daily indignities of the world around us. You shouldn't have to endure discrimination within the LGBTQ movement," Carey said. "I am not the LGBTQ movement, but let's just say for a moment I am. On behalf of the movement, I apologize to you. Our movement and our country owe you a debt of gratitude for insisting on your humanity, for not giving up and for showing leadership."

While Creating Change is always a time to mark this progress, Carey added that the LGBTQ community has its work cut out pointing to 29 states, including Michigan, that don't have full statewide non-discrimination protections, adding that HIV-specific criminal laws still exist; transgender women of color are being murdered; that there is impeded access to birth control and abortion; religious-based foster and adoption agencies are allowed to reject same-sex couples as parents; there are no federal non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people; and transgender people are banned from the military.

Carey then pointed to the resolve needed to move forward in a time where much work still exists to be done.

"What is required of us to move into this next era of LGBTQ freedom is to have faith, have hope and trust in the power of our collective action," Carey said. "After decades of work and the past two years of this crap we know folks are exhausted yet the road is longer still. We know far too well that our rights have never been given to us, but have been fought for decades and even centuries, winning at high cost to many of our ancestors, our elders and many of you in this room. But even with all we face today, we are making progress."

However, the duo's message emphasized that the movement doesn't expect its members to be tireless; there will be human days. Johnson left this message of strength.

"Be tired, but also be fired up. We have to remember it didn't just take a year or two to win the right to vote for women ... to win civil rights ... to get the government to pay attention

to gay and bisexual men and people of color who were dying of AIDS ... to win marriage equality," Johnson said. "We all know that we have to be in it for the long haul."

Finally, the pair asked conference attendees to be "unrelenting," "bold," "willing to act fully knowing that at times you will fail," and to "insist that the government be responsible to LGBTQ people and the wholeness of our lives."

"You, we in this room, and thousands of people across the country like us will be the ones to move the ball forward towards full freedom and liberation for LGBTQ people," Carey said. "This LGBTQ movement was made for this time. You were made for this time. We were made for this time. We will honor our ancestors and our children by fighting like hell and remember our full vision for full liberation for justice and freedom is more than possible, it's inevitable."

## Welcome to Detroit Plenary

Though the official starting date for the Conference was on Wednesday, Jan. 23, during which attendees could dedicate time to the day-long and well-known Creating Change Racial Justice Institute in order to re-evaluate relationships with race within the LGBTQ community via "games, storytelling, personal reflection and participatory learning."

"As we deepen our relationships and build towards collective liberation, beginners will find their wings and longtime racial justice organizers will find new pathways to deepen their practice," wrote event organizers.

Also included in the first day were

gatherings for spiritual members of the LGBTQ community as well as ones concerning higher education professionals.

However, it was on Thursday, Jan. 24, that attendees got a formal welcome to the goings-on at the event via a First Timer's Orientation session and an official "Welcome to Detroit: Revive, Thrive, Decolonize" opening plenary. It was also at this session that Creating Change had a brush with controversy. As the event's Director Andy Garcia and Johnson took the stage to address the audience, Garcia made the first statement.

"Creating Change is a conference where the LGBTQ movement learns and connects, resists and persists, and dances and advances together," Garcia said to a cheer. "It's also the largest conference for LGBTQ activism in the country, and it has been for 31 years. We're on the shoulders of giants here, carrying on a lot of history of fighting for freedom, justice and equality for LGBTQ people —"

It was at that point that a group of protestors used a noisemaker to distract from the director's comments and took the stage, chanting "Free, free Palestine." The first, unnamed protestor's remarks were met with a cheer, too.

"Hi, we're the Cancel Pinkwashing Coalition protesting pinkwashing and censorship of the Task Force since 2016, and we're back again because there has been a continued ban on Palestinian content and that is stretched into Jewish and Muslim content at this conference and we won't stand for that," they said. "... [We] want there to be a robust programming that reflects the Task Force's so-called commitment to change, dignity and equality and, by the way, the anti-Muslim ban ad in all of your programs."

Pinkwashing is defined as the promotion of a corporation or political entity's LGBTQ-friendliness to downplay other negative qualities. The protestors claimed to have

submitted their own workshops to discuss the Israel-Palestinian conflict but were rejected. A second protestor then took the stage to outline the group's demands:

1.) To lift the "informal ban" on Palestinian content at the conference and "stop pinkwashing Israeli apartheid."

2.) A public apology from CC leadership to the "queer and Muslim and trans Jewish" communities.

3.) A commitment to providing time and space for workshops focused on "queer and trans Palestinian liberation."

4.) A commitment to providing time and space for Jewish and Muslim faith programming equal to Christian programming.

The protestors also provided information on two guerilla workshops of their own. After the roughly 10-minute break in scheduled programming, the protestors left the stage chanting "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

In response to the interruption, a visibly emotional Johnson returned to her space at the podium with Garcia.

"As hard as it is to receive criticism and developmental feedback, it is part of being a community together," Johnson said to a cheer. "Evolution doesn't happen quickly, and we have to hold each other every step of the very long that it takes to get there."

As scheduled programming resumed, the four local Creating Change Co-Chairs Cara Mitrano, Bridie Johnson, Davis Nelson Jr. and Lilianna Angel Reyes, took the stage. Their role was to serve as Detroit-based organizers tasked with aiding scheduled programming. Mitrano spoke first, urging attendees to engage in thoughtful conversation during the conference.

"Detroit has a history of initiating national dialogues on issues of race, civil rights, gentrification and other topics," Mitrano said. "Likewise, Creating Change hopes to start dialogue in new and important ways. Some of these conversations may put you out of your comfort zone. Take this opportunity to broaden your perspectives and learn from others - especially those who have been historically or personally marginalized by the queer movement."

Reyes, an openly transgender woman and Executive Director of the Trans Sistas of Color Project, addressed Detroit's resolute transgender community in her remarks spurring activism on.

"I really urge you all as activists to center trans women of color. Just recently we lost someone who was shot and killed in a park that's ours. So, we as trans women of color, through all that anger, went to court to represent her and her family and we will continue to do

so and we will continue to fight," Reyes said. "And we'd love it if you fought with us, because I feel sorry if you fight against us."

Following Nelson's and Bridie Johnson's address, the Conference received a formal Anishinaabe welcome to Turtle Island.

"We cannot forget that this is stolen land, so this is space is not recognize as the United States, Canada and Mexico, but this is Turtle Island so we welcome you to Turtle Island and hope you have a great conference," presenters said.

The evening closed off with a panel discussion hosted by activist, radio personality and occasional BTL contributor Michelle E. Brown. Joining her were former Michigan gubernatorial candidate Abdul El-Sayed and activists Cecelia Rose LaPointe and Cynthia L. Thornton. Their discussion covered a variety of topics ranging from colonialism, visibility, collaboration with conservative people, LGBTQ equality in jobs, housing and combatting racism. El-Sayed summed up the overall message of the panel meeting well.

"We've got a responsibility to come together in rooms like this to say, 'We will not fight each other anymore. Instead, I will see my struggle in you and we will stand up to the system that has led to our oppression,'" he said.

Lastly, the opening night marked the beginning of the award-heavy Conference. Six individuals and one organization were honored during the days-long event for their contributions to the community. First to take the stage was Cornelius Wilson, a longtime HIV/AIDS activist and founding member of the SAGE organization which works to aid LGBTQ Elders. An emotional Wilson took the stage when his name was called.

"Thank you," Wilson said. "... I am honored and humbled to be acknowledged by my peers, both prime and the new generation for this work in advocacy that I've accomplished throughout the years."

During his address, Wilson emphasized that even with his lifelong work, there still remain too many individuals in need of services and resources while "still too many of us sit on the sidelines doing nothing."

Wilson left the audience with a final note, particularly directed at the young members of the LGBTQ movement.

"I would say to my young peers, I dare you to become an elder," he said. "I dare you to continue the work that's been done and be the ones standing here so when the next generation of youth come along, you have improved upon the things that we have done."



Cornelius Wilson receives the SAGE Advocacy for Leadership on Aging Issues award Jan. 24. BTL photo: Eve Kucharski



BTL Photo: Miz Korona.

## Rashida Tlaib Addresses Creating Change Conference Congresswoman on Trans Women of Color: 'We Have to End the Silence'

Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib addressed the National LGBTQ Task Force's Creating Change conference on Saturday, Jan. 26. Tlaib kicked off her remarks by stating, "Welcome to the most beautiful, blackest city in the country, the city of Detroit."

Discussing her work in Congress, Tlaib told conference attendees she had joined the Congressional Equality Caucus.

"I want you all to know that it's not just about legislation for me. It really isn't. I'm an organizer, community member and activist first. We have to make sure that we are lifting up the need for everyone to live their lives without systematic barriers rooted in bigotry and racism. We have to rid this society of

oppressive ideals. We have to fight against transphobia, homophobia, racism, anti-blackness, islamophobia, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism - you name it. Because we know that these things are intertwined, they are so connected. We know that those that advance hate, they are trying to deny it for all of us, they are trying to deny all of our existence."

Tlaib added, "We know how this hate has led to trans women of color being harmed and killed. Not having many in public service speak out about it, is not the way, we have to speak out about it. We have to end the silence."

*Find the entire speech on [pridesource.com](https://pridesource.com).*

# BTL Co-Publishers Jan Stevenson, Susan Horowitz Awarded for Activism at Creating Change

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Dedicating one's time and energy to being an activist, particularly to a cause like LGBTQ civil rights, is never something undertaken lightly. Perhaps even rarer is a person who is willing to dedicate their life to such a cause. In the case of wives and *Between The Lines* Co-Publishers Jan Stevenson and Susan Horowitz, their decades-long commitment to enhancing the lives of the LGBTQ community in Michigan and beyond via their work in publishing and through the National LGBTQ Task Force has not been lost on their peers. Recognized last week at the Task Force-sponsored 2019 Creating Change Conference, the couple received the Susan J. Hyde Award dedicated to their longevity in the movement.

"I was totally humbled and grateful," Horowitz said of learning she had been chosen to receive the award. "You don't want to rush ahead, but at this point in your life, to be honored for the work that you've done is pretty cool."

The award itself is named for the former Creating Change Director Sue Hyde who dedicated a 30-year career to bringing the national Conference to LGBTQ people of all walks of life around the U.S. Hyde was also in attendance last week to present the couple with their honor.

"I am honored and proud to present the Susan J. Hyde Award for Longevity in the movement to two women well-loved in the Detroit area, in Southeast Michigan, in Michigan and in the United States' LGBTQ communities," Hyde said in her address. "... Hereabouts you know Jan and Susan as longtime movement stalwarts since 1995."



Jan Stevenson and Susan Horowitz receive the Susan J. Hyde Award for Longevity in the Movement, Friday, Jan. 25, at the Creating Change conference in Detroit. Sue Hyde presented the award. BTL Photo: Andrew Potter

Hyde went on to address both Stevenson's and Horowitz's work within their local communities, how they met and began their collaboration, and to thank them for their service.

"As I talked with Susan and Jan about their well-lived lives, we reveled in their very long and complicated herstories of work in this community and in this movement. I reminded them both that participation in oral history projects and written memoirs would yet be another wonderful gift to all of us and we laughingly renamed the award to be 'the too stubborn to quit award,'" Hyde said. "So thank you ... for blessing us with the assurance that whoever we are, and no matter how forsaken we

may feel, that we all have a place in the family of LGBTQ people."

Stevenson took the podium first, welcoming Creating Change attendees to Detroit, expressing her gratitude for the recognition and emphasizing what the Task Force has meant to her in both her life and career.

"It's a great honor to receive this award from the Task Force, an organization that I have served and loved for decades and that the award is named after one of my personal heroines, Sue Hyde," Stevenson said. "The theme of this conference ... resonates so strongly because that's what the Task Force is to me. As a board member and volunteer, I learned about organizing, working in diverse groups,

struggling with complex issues and learning to accept that the good is not the enemy of the perfect. The Task Force, and especially Sue Hyde, have embodied to me that in organizing, kindness, empathy and compassion are as important as being right; that empowering others raises us all."

Horowitz spoke next, speaking directly to longevity and reflecting on the great forward strides in progress that have been attained since she first came out as a lesbian.

"Next month marks 47 years ago at the age of 19 that I came out in 1972. That world defined me as a criminal and mentally ill — not great for a job hunt. It was disturbing and shame-based language that too often succeeded in isolating and killing too many of us. I was lucky and I soon found a radically different message on a button with just three words ... 'Gay is good,' Horowitz said. "... It filled my heart with hope. I knew then and I believe today, as I am sure Frank Kameny did, that who has the power to define us in life is an essential key to our liberation. It's why I was attracted to printing presses, why I started a film festival and why I am committed to our community newspaper here in Michigan, *Between The Lines*."

Horowitz finished her remarks with an overall message of thanks to the Conference.

"In the wise words of Sue Hyde, I want to remind you of something she said last year: 'May Creating Change always be our space and place and time to love each other, to nurture each other, and to build a movement that secures freedom, justice, dignity and equity for all of us.'"

*To view the full introduction and acceptance speech on online to BTL's Facebook page at [gaybe.am/Lp](https://www.facebook.com/BTLp).*



A panel of speakers addresses Creating Change attendees at the "Movement Moments: #MeToo" plenary on Saturday, Jan. 26. BTL Photo: Miz Korona.



Activist Shane Shananaquet addresses the crowd as he accepts the Youth Leadership Award. BTL Photo: Miz Korona.



Task Force Deputy Executive Director Kierra Johnson and Executive Director Rea Carey address the audience at the "State of the Movement" plenary.



# Religious Liberty Attorney May Challenge Whitmer's LGBTQ Directive

BY BTL STAFF

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's new executive directive barring LGBTQ discrimination may be challenged by the head of the State Bar's Religious Liberty section, according to the Michigan Advance.

The publication obtained an email from Tracy Lee, a West Bloomfield family law and nonprofit attorney, and reported that she "wrote to a group of lawyers encouraging them to 'identify business owners who receive state funding in Michigan and are willing to do a pre-emptive challenge against Governor Whitmer's executive directive.'"

Whitmer's directive, signed on Monday, Jan. 7, outlines that it will help instill policies to "promote public confidence in the fairness and integrity of state government" by ensuring all Michigan residents receive fair treatment in "employment, state contracting and when accessing services from state government." It does not include an exemption for religious organizations that receive state money.

Lee's email follows a unanimous resolution on Jan. 16, from the Alcona County Board of Commissioners opposing Whitmer's effort to protect the LGBTQ community. The board

agreed that by signing the executive order, the governor "circumvented the legislative process" in invoking the Michigan Civil Rights Commission's recently expanded definition of sex discrimination, which previously did not include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Unlike 18 other states, Michigan does not currently have a state law that explicitly prohibits anti-LGBTQ discrimination in employment, housing or public accommodations. As of May 2018, the Commission began processing complaints of sex discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Equality Michigan tweeted a response to the possibility that Lee may file a lawsuit.

"The attorney referenced is affiliated with two infamous, anti-LGBT hate groups. As stated in the article, 'both the Governor and the Michigan Civil Rights Commission acted within their legal authority.' ... Our religious liberties have not been infringed upon. The freedom of religion is one of our most fundamental rights, it's enshrined in Constitution. This is just another attempt by the anti-LGBT movement to assert their religious beliefs as a way to discriminate against others."

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## Judge Grants More Time for Settlement in Same-Sex Adoption Case

### AG Nessel Replaced State Attorneys, Will Enter Settlement Discussions

A federal district court judge has granted more time to reach a settlement in a case challenging state taxpayer funding for faith-based foster care and adoption agencies that refuse to work with same-sex couples.

“We want this practice to stop,” said Jay Kaplan, a staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan LGBT Project. He added that these are agencies that have signed contracts with the state saying that they won’t discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

And that’s what the American Civil Liberties Union is challenging – the state of Michigan’s refusal to take action on these contract violations.

“We didn’t challenge the 2015 law because we don’t believe that the language of the law permits faith-based foster care and adoption agencies to turn away same-sex couples, despite what legislators said,” said Kaplan, pointing to the controversial bill signed into law in 2015 by former Gov. Rick Snyder, which makes it legal for faith-based, child-placing agencies to deny services if they conflict with religious beliefs.

Attorney General Dana Nessel, who said during her campaign that she would not defend the 2015 law, replaced the state attorneys on Wednesday, Jan. 23, and will enter the settlement discussions with the ACLU on behalf of Kristy and Dana Dumont of Dimondale and Erin and Rebecca Busk-Sutton of Detroit.

“Our client agency and the plaintiffs have expressed an interest in resolving this matter and, as such, we intend to engage in a concerted effort to settle the matter,” said Nessel spokeswoman Kelly Rossman-McKinney in a statement Jan. 25.

A 30-day stay was granted by the judge so they can try to resolve their legal differences with the state.

“It’s hard to predict what will happen in talks, but we remain optimistic,” Kaplan said. “And if we are successful settling this will mean that same-sex couples are afforded the full range of foster and adoption agencies that heterosexual couples are.”

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# OBITUARY

Nathan D. Strickland, Jr.

Feb. 7, 1991 – Jan. 24, 2019

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

He had, friends say, warm eyes and a nice smile and always a kind word for everyone. Community activist Nathan D. Strickland Jr., widely recognized as an up and coming leader in the LGBTQ community, succumbed to his lengthy battle with cancer Jan. 24. He passed just two weeks before what would have been his 28th birthday.

Strickland grew up in Grosse Pointe Woods and graduated from Grosse Pointe North High School in 2009. He went on to earn first his bachelor’s degree in criminal justice, specifically forensic psychology, from Tiffin University in Ohio. Later, he picked up a master’s degree in community counseling from Oakland University.

In 2013, Strickland started attending Talk Tuesdays at KICK, which led to him volunteering for the agency, which later changed its name to LGBT Detroit. He attended the agency’s Leadership Academy and finished the program in 2013. It was through KICK that he met Logan McClendon and Darius Baty. The trio, with a couple of additional friends, would go on to call themselves the Sailor Scouts, a name taken from the popular Japanese anime series “Sailor Moon.” In “Sailor Moon,” the scouts, who are all female, are a team of magical soldiers who protect the solar system from evil and injustice. Strickland’s scout name was Mercury.

“Nathan was an optimistic, happy, quirky, nerdy person,” Baty said. “Those were all his qualities and they played into his professional life and his social life. I met him in 2013 through KICK. After that we just got really close and he wound up joining Kappa Psi Kappa fraternity and he crossed in 2015. His fraternity name was Kaliber. He was my pledge and I was his assistant dean of pledges for that.”

Also in 2015, Strickland was chosen as one of 10 leaders in Detroit to receive a Black Male Engagement Leader Award and was given \$10,000. At the time, LGBT Detroit Executive Director Curtis Lipscomb said that Strickland was “the epitome of what young leadership looks like.”

By then, Strickland had worked his

way up to health and wellness director for LGBT Detroit, but he would eventually leave the agency in 2016 and move to the Community Health Awareness Group, where he

worked as a high impact prevention specialist. While at CHAG though, Strickland would continue to volunteer for LGBT Detroit and Hotter Than July – Detroit’s black gay pride festival. He had also by this time started playing the violin and the viola in the Detroit Medical Orchestra.

Through it all, Strickland continued to hang out with the scouts.

“We would go out dancing together and of course have a night out on the town,” McClendon said. “We would go out to dinner together very frequently. We would travel together. We would visit each other’s houses and help each other move and go to each other’s house warmings and things like that. We were really integrated into each other’s lives.”

Among the scouts, Strickland was known as the sweet one.

“He was always kind with his words,” McClendon said. “Nathan was one of the most intellectual people I’ve ever met, so as deep as you want to go or as surface level as you want to go, Nathan could hang with you. He was that guy you could talk to you about anything. He could give you advice about anything.”

Both McClendon and Baty agree that one of the things they will most remember about their friend is his laugh.

“When he laughed everyone in the room had no choice but to laugh because it was so boisterous, it was so peculiar,” McClendon said. “It was so all-encompassing. We could never not acknowledge it because it was so prominent and so heartwarming and endearing.”

Baty said much of the same. “Not only was his laugh infectious, it was a standout sound,” he said. “He



started laughing and he would be like gasping. Every time he would start, I’d be like, ‘OK, Nathan, stop.’ It would go on for 15 minutes and then everybody there would start laughing until we forgot what we were laughing about.”

In recent years, Nathan continued to laugh even as he battled cancer. Though he initially contracted it in the muscles in his back, which he would have removed, the cancer would eventually come back and continue to spread.

“We talked about it all the time, about his different treatments,” Baty said. “He worked with Henry Ford and his primary care doctor was at St. John’s. When they did the last trial, the doctors were pretty much saying they didn’t know what else they could do. Nathan started losing weight and he started looking older and we were talking and I said, ‘Are you sure you want to keep doing this? Because now it’s not the cancer that’s doing this, it’s the treatment.’”

As recent as a couple of weeks ago, Strickland would reunite with the scouts for what would be the last time.

“We finally did our brunch for the new year and Nathan was still bright, happy Nathan,” Baty said. “But he looked like he was 86 years old. His hair was totally white, he was on oxygen. Yet he was still optimistic.”

Strickland is survived by his parents Debra and Nathan Sr., as well as his brother Tony Strickland and his sister Nicole Strickland.

*Visitation will take place at the A. H. Peters Funeral Home, located at 20705 Mack Ave. in Grosse Pointe Woods, from 2 to 9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 1. Funeral services will take place Saturday, Feb. 2, at 11 a.m. at the Grosse Pointe Congregational Church, located at 240 Chalfonte St. in Grosse Pointe Farms.*

# Jackson LGBTQ Liaison Julia Josling Outlines Goals for 2019

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Last June, Jackson Mayor Derek Dobies appointed local activist Julia Josling to the volunteer position of LGBTQ liaison to the mayor's office. Now, after seven months on the job, Josling chatted with BTL to reflect on her new position and her plans for the future.

"I took on the role of the LGBTQ liaison because I felt a responsibility as a transgender individual to advocate for the LGBTQ community," Josling said. "I am a social worker, so advocacy has always been an important aspect of my life. I have personally faced discrimination and know what that feels like. I know LGBTQ individuals who have forgone accessing needed services or have not had their voices heard simply because of who they are, or who they love. When presented with an opportunity to advocate for the LGBTQ community, I could not decline because I believe everyone should have a voice as well as a seat at the table."

Josling was an obvious choice for the LGBTQ liaison position having worked in Jackson on progressive causes for the past several years. Currently serving as the president of PFLAG Jackson, Josling also worked with Jackson

Together in 2017, which successfully helped to pass the city's non-discrimination ordinance.

"It was through these efforts I became involved in city government and gained an understanding of why change on the local level is so important," Josling said. "I also sit as a commissioner on our City's Human Relations Commission and stay involved with efforts to bring the community together."

Josling's full-time job is as a social worker for Washtenaw County Community Mental Health. She holds a master's degree in social work from Walden University and is a member of the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists and the National Association of Social Workers.

Now, as LGBTQ liaison, Josling said she has two main areas of focus.

"The first is creating stronger relationships between the LGBTQ community and the City of Jackson," she said. "This has already been moving forward prior to my coming on as the LGBTQ liaison. There have been growing numbers of LGBTQ members and support organizations within the city as we continue to work toward building a longstanding reputation of Jackson being a welcoming and inclusive town.



Julia Josling

"The second area of focus is to increase the amount of LGBTQ inclusive resources within the City of Jackson," Josling continued. "This includes medical and mental health professionals. The Jackson Pride Center, a local non-profit organization, has been doing remarkable work with identifying these types of resources currently in the Jackson community. Something as simple as visiting the doctor can

be difficult for an LGBTQ person if they feel they are not safe or welcome. It is important to examine how to increase both the amount and visibility of inclusive services in the city."

Future goals, Josling said, include continuing to identify ways of strengthening relationships between the LGBTQ community and the City of Jackson.

"Ideally, we would like to have a longstanding reputation of Jackson being a welcoming and inclusive community," she said. "This helps promote both social and economic growth in our city. We want to attract new businesses and talented individuals to help steer our city into future generations, and one of the best ways we do this is by sending the message that everyone is welcome here."

So far, Dobies said he is pleased with the job that Josling has been doing.

"Julia is surely a trailblazer for our city," he said. "With her continued leadership, the LGBTQ community has someone as city hall that understands their concerns and can act on their needs. She's working to help Jackson become a leader in building a more tolerant, inclusive city. I'm proud to work with her to create a more welcoming city for LGBTQ families to call home."

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## Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

### When Arts' Gay Fleet Scuttlebuted!

Back in the “good old days” of Great Depression No. 1, following Stock Market Crash '29 years and years – well, at least a galloping few – before my time, the arts with a capital “A” took a real financial broadsiding.

Money for spending on painting, sculpture, plays and Broadway musicals wasn't available as it had been during The Roaring '20s, when my sainted mother was just a kid and I not a twinkling (or Twink) in anybody's eye.

“Brother Can You Spare a Dime?” became a second national anthem, and many a poor soul eked out an existence selling carefully polished apples on street corners.

The only ‘art’ that thrived were movies. (Two hours of once-a-month escapism with cartoons. Twelve cents. Popcorn, a nickel. Salted. Rarely, if ever, buttered.)

Shortly after President Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office in '33 – defeating the Trump of his day, dour, but, in contrast to Blond Bombshell Donald, highly articulate Herbert Hoover – the WAP or Works Art Project was formed.

WAP provided federal funding to keep artists, musicians, composers and playwrights afloat.

This was a wise move for FDR's administration, for a nation cannot be truly healthy without visionaries to show the way. One of those WAP recipients, Paul Cadmus, was gay. There were others, too, but Cadmus – remembered today by a recent DVD biographical title of “Enfant Terrible at 80” – is special.

Cadmus, who died 20 years ago at 95, made it big at 30, not only as a supremely gifted artist, but as a cause celebre of big-time art censorship.

He was partnered with artist Jared French (1937 - 1945) and his beloved artist model Jon Anderson (1945 - 1999).

The resulting national notoriety and newspaper publicity got his career going ship-ahoy! with a thundering five-gun salute and a long-lasting, highly memorable finish. Here's the background:

Way back in America's '20s and '30s, homosexual men frequently identified themselves as “gay” – for straights the word meant happy – by wearing a red tie. (In Oscar Wilde's Victorian England they signaled by wearing a green carnation. Wilde said he ‘invented’ the ID.)

In 1934, “The Fleet's In!” painted by Cadmus, was chosen by the WAP for inclusion in a show at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Within a day or two of the opening, a testy letter to the editor appeared in The Evening Star, denouncing “Fleet” as anything but “in port,” as far as the Navy might be concerned. “Unpatriotic!” “Damnably Neurotic!” “Red Tie Tut Tut!”

Others voices shrilly joined in. Editorials clamored. Prompted by shocked outcries about showing sailors as rowdy party types (and who's that fey-looking guy in the background with the signal red tie – and you know what that means – elbow, elbow – don't you?).

Secretary of the Navy Claude A. Swanson pulled the plug on the fleet. He ordered Assistant Secretary of the Navy Henry Latrobe Roosevelt, a cousin to the President, to scuttlebutt the painting.

See **Parting Glances**, continued on next page



**“AT LEAST YOUR BAN ON TRANSGENDER SOLDIERS IS BACK ON! THAT'S KIND OF LIKE A WALL, ISN'T IT? SEE? YOU'RE WINNING! WHY NOT COME OUT NOW..”**

## Viewpoint



BY MICHELLE E. BROWN

### Lessons in Change: Our Past, Our Present, Our Future

I am a Detroit, born and raised. So was my mother. My father, although born in Kentucky, grew up in Chatham, Ontario, before settling in Detroit.

I didn't know anything about the “Green Book” guide until I was an adult learning about the Civil Rights movement. I couldn't relate directly with some of the events in the film of the same name that took place in the south, but the scenes with police lights flashing in the rearview mirror hit close to home. I remember our family driving on the streets of Detroit or in the suburbs and seeing those lights in the rearview mirror.

My father would tense up mumbling something like, “What now?” while my mother would touch his hand reminding him to stay calm. Our instructions were to just sit still and be quiet. This was before the '67 Rebellion when approximately 93 percent of the police department was white.

Incidents of police brutality made African-Americans feel at risk and unsafe every time we stepped out of the house. Driving too fast or too slow, a broken tail light, anything just from driving while, walking while, living while black.

After the Rebellion, with increased calls for more representative, community responsive policing under the umbrella of affirmative action, I had an uncle join the police force.

It wasn't totally about helping our community – the pay was pretty good too – but there was a part of him that believed having brothers on the street and on the force would protect other brothers on the street.

It wasn't easy. He would share stories of harassment from his white “brothers in blue” on the job. He also talked about the pushback from his black community because he was “working for the man.” He was called a snitch, a pig and worse.

He wasn't perfect. He had his own

code of conduct for our community. He would come down hard on those he considered “knuckleheads” but would “give a brother a break” often.

Even I felt his wrath when he saw me hanging out with those “knuckleheads” raising our fists in protest, calling for Black Power. I'm pretty sure I called him a pig but was glad it was him who rolled up on us in that police car instead of a white cop who might have just cracked our heads.

Churchill said, “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” The Detroit Police Department now has one of the largest percentages of black officers of any major city police department.

A lot has changed but a lot has not. Driving, walking, living while black is no safer. People who are black, Hispanic and Native American are disproportionately shot and killed by police today, especially

See **Viewpoint**, continued on next page

## ► Viewpoint

Continued from p. 10

young people.

And if you are a member of the LGBTQ community you are often not only targeted by law enforcement but your victimization is often ignored and even criminalized. So it's no wonder that for many LGBTQ people, youths and people of color, in spaces designated as safe, members of law enforcement are not welcome.

This brings us to Creating Change 2019 and the treatment of Cpl. Dani Woods, community activist and LGBT Liaison with the Detroit Police Department.

I don't know the percentage, but it's safe to say the majority of police officers in this city are heterosexual and male.

As a police officer, Woods heard her co-workers verbally disrespect members of her LGBTQ community, respond slowly to calls for assistance, even disparage, victimize and criminalize individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender expression.

We've come a long way but still being black and female on any police force isn't a walk in the park. But Dani also has that third identity: being LGBTQ. And that identity would not allow her to sit idly by while her community was under attack from those committed to "protect and serve."

In 2006 she approached her supervisor about the need for a community liaison officer for the LGBTQ community, receiving her appointment in 2013.

Like my uncle back in the day, she's had her fair share of off-color remarks, smirks and shade from within the police ranks as well as pushback from some members of the community not for Dani personally but because she has been a member of law enforcement.

But she has persevered, helping to build mutual trust, respect and understanding between the LGBTQ community and law enforcement, ensuring that LGBT people feel safe and protected particularly when they report crimes, and when educating fellow

**Is there still a long way to go before members of the LGBTQ community can feel protected and served by law enforcement? Yes, a very long way to go not only in law enforcement but in our judiciary and laws enacted across the nation.**

officers on LGBT culture through mandatory sensitivity training.

Is she perfect? (Well, almost) No!

Is there still a long way to go before members of the LGBTQ community can feel protected and served by law enforcement? Yes, a very long way to go not only in law enforcement but in our judiciary and laws enacted across the nation.

I still have moments of feeling unsafe, wondering, "What now?" when I see those flashing lights in my rearview mirror; thinking about Sandra Bland, Aiyana Jones, Miriam Carey and the other black and brown women, children and men shot and killed by police. My trans sisters and brothers come to mind, too, whose murders have been under-investigated and lives criminalized.

But just like back in the day with uncle Gil, I'd rather have a Dani Woods roll up in that squad car rather than just any heterosexual cop who has no clue about my LGBTQ life.

Until we have an overhaul of our judicial, law enforcement and laws recognizing the rights and protections of every human being, and as long as ignorance and hate prevail, there is no safe space.

Here was a moment – dare I say a teachable moment – where, instead of reacting, we could have found common ground, engaged in real, strategic conversation in a safe space to create change.

---

*Michelle E. Brown is a public speaker, activist and author. Her blog radio podcast "Collections By Michelle Brown" airs every Thursday at 7 p.m. Current and archived episodes can be heard on Blog Talk Radio, iTunes, Stitcher or SoundCloud. Follow her on Facebook at facebook.com/CollectionsByMichelleBrown/.*

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Moral: If you want to make a name for yourself in the art world – talent or no talent – start with a loud-mouthed censorship. (By the way: Cadmus, one hell of a painter, had talent to burn!)

If you want to signal gay color-coding try handkerchiefs, worn right for top, left for bottom. (Log Cabin Republicans who support Trump wear rainbow flags right. Pence, flags left. Or is it vice versa?)

---

*Charles Alexander is prolific both as a BTL columnist (700-plus columns) and as a well-known LGBT community artist (1000 Facebook images). He is a Spirit of Detroit Award recipient and an Affirmations LGBT CENTER Jan Stevenson awardee. Connect with him at Charles@pridesource.com.*

## Creep Of The Week

### Donald Trump

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Donald Trump is a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad president. This is something that has been clear to the majority of Americans from the get-go.

Trump's white evangelical Christian base, however, is largely sticking with him, though poll numbers show he is slipping with them, too. Grinding the government to a halt while he stomped his feet demanding his Great Wall of Racism be built, which tossed billions of dollars into the toilet was not a popular move it turns out.

Not that his base really blamed him for the shutdown. The media did a fantastic job of both-siding the story as if Trump, asking for something completely unreasonable, and Democrats, saying NOPE, were equally to blame.

Still, his base won't quit him because Trump is always throwing them a bouquet blooming with bigotry. After all, when it comes to keeping the base happy, it's all about hurting the right people.

Which is why it feels right to acknowledge the one-year anniversary of the Conscience and Religious Freedom Division of the Department of Health and Human Services. If you don't remember, the division was created to protect health care providers who have a religious objection to participating in sin-care like abortion or gender affirmation procedures.

Under George W. Bush, health care workers were given pretty broad protections for refusing to do something if they claimed God told them not to, but President Obama rolled back those protections because they were discriminatory and harmful.

But discriminatory and harmful is totally Trump's wheelhouse, so the Department of Health and Human Services made "religious freedom" its top priority, protecting objectors and punishing places that aren't totes cool with: say, a pharmacist refusing to fill a birth control prescription; a doctor who refuses to treat AIDS cases; or a nurse who won't help transgender patients.

This was "a significant shift for the office," reported Politico, "which currently focuses on enforcing federal civil rights and health care privacy laws."

In other words, a department that is supposed to protect people from discrimination instead protects the people who want to do the discriminating. So long as the discrimination is God-approved, of course.

"This is the use of religion to hurt people because you disapprove of who they are," Harper Jean Tobin of the National Center for Transgender Equality said in 2018, according to Politico. "Any rule that grants a

**The creation of the Conscience and Religious Freedom Division of HHS is one of the reasons I can't watch the second season of "The Handmaid's Tale." Mike Pence is another. It feels too much like a documentary.**

license to discriminate would be a disgrace and a mockery of the principal of religious freedom we all cherish."

Tobin was on the money, though disgrace and mockery are also Trump strong suits, so I suspect there was never a chance he would be moved.

Now you might be asking yourself, "Does this really matter? Our health care system is free market based! If a doctor doesn't want to treat you then just go to another one! Vote with your feet."

If this is possible for you, then congratulations on your privilege. But this is, of course, not possible for a lot of people. For one thing, if you're seeking emergency care for, say, a burst appendix, you can't really shop around. Nor do you have much choice if you're in a small town with only one pharmacy or if you're having a miscarriage in an area of the country that is served only by Catholic hospital systems ("Full Frontal with Samantha Bee" did an amazing segment on this issue in 2016. Google it).

The new and improved religious freedom rule was unveiled right before the annual March for Life in Washington D.C. where abortion opponents gather to protest abortion. This is not to be confused with March for Our Lives at which actual living children marched to protest being gunned down at their schools.

Trump's religious right supporters see him as an instrument of God who will finally, by packing the Supreme Court with far-right extremists, undo legal abortion in the United States and give every child a chance to be shot at school. Like God intended.

These same supporters would also like to see marriage equality undone. And we've already seen the constant battering transgender and gender non-conforming folks have received at the hands of this president and his administration.

The creation of the Conscience and Religious Freedom Division of HHS is one of the reasons I can't watch the second season of "The Handmaid's Tale." Mike Pence is another. It feels too much like a documentary.

A lot of damage has been done since 2016. And there's a lot more to come. A right-wing nosedive into fascism is not inevitable. It doesn't have to be like this. Keep fighting.

## ► Parting Glances

Continued from p. 12

"Fleet's In" wound up sunk out of sight in D.C.'s Alibi Club until 1981, when 47 years later – still under guard in the naval brig, if you will – it was restored at Navy expense, under threat of public lawsuit, in time for a Cadmus retrospective.

The painting was put on permanent exhibit in 1985 at The Navy Museum, Washington Navy Yard. Six years later, on two separate occasions, feminist visitors objected that the painting depicted sexual harassment. (One presumes of the dockside doxies, not the guy in the red tie.)

# Recent Legal Updates Regarding LGBTQ People

BY BTL STAFF

Last week, the American Civil Liberties Union took action against two major companies that their clients allege have participated in sex discrimination: McDonald's and Chili's. Additionally, the ACLU is awaiting news from the Supreme Court about cases that consider whether or not federal workplace discrimination law protects LGBTQ people from discrimination on the basis of sex.

## McDonald's

On Monday, Jan. 14, the ACLU joined forces with the Fight for \$15 minimum wage movement and the law firms of Altshuler Berzon LLP and Outten & Golden LLP to lay the groundwork for the next wave of EEOC sexual harassment charges against the company.

"As one of the country's largest employers and the most profitable fast-food chain, McDonald's must be held accountable," said Gillian Thomas, senior staff attorney, ACLU women's rights project.

At this stage, the ACLU is seeking additional plaintiffs to expand the scope of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission charges and prepare for a potential lawsuit filing. As recently as May 2018, 10 women working in McDonald's restaurants stretching from California to Florida filed EEOC charges of discrimination alleging a wide range of unchecked harassment, perpetrated by supervisors and co-workers.

According to the ACLU, the misconduct documented in the pending EEOC charges runs the gamut from sexually explicit comments to improper touching. The women — one of whom was just 15 years old at the time she was harassed — further contend that McDonald's provides little to no information about harassment or how to lodge a complaint, the ACLU reports. But when they did complain, the women faced retaliation, including cuts in their hours, unwarranted discipline and outright termination.

"McDonald's likes to evade responsibility for the abuse occurring in its restaurants around the country by explaining that the majority are independently owned franchises," Thomas

said. "The company contends that civil rights violations occurring at those locations are, to put it bluntly, not its problem. But where a company dictates the smallest details in how franchisees fulfill its brand — down to what kind of pickles they may use — it should not be able to absolve itself of the harassment endured by the people who make that brand profitable."

As a result, McDonald's employees have asked the company to, among other measures, strengthen its policies against harassment; mandate training for all supervisors and employees; create a safe and effective system for receiving and responding to complaints; and convene a committee of workers, representatives from corporate and franchise stores, and workers' rights advocates to identify other remedies.

"These are common-sense demands," Thomas said. "We will be working to assure that they become a reality."

## Chili's

On Wednesday, Jan. 16, the ACLU filed an EEOC complaint on behalf of Meagan Hunter, alleging that she was denied a promotion at Chili's because she needed to "dress more gender appropriate." Hunter, a lesbian, asked why she could not wear a chef-style coat like the one her general manager wore and was told, "it's for boys."

"Meagan's story is shocking, but it is far from unique. All too often, women and LGBTQ people are excluded from opportunities at work and school because they don't look the part," said Ria Tabacco Mar, senior staff attorney, ACLU LGBT & HIV project. "In Meagan's case, her boss told her she wouldn't advance professionally because she did not look feminine enough. Yet on plenty of occasions, women and LGBTQ people face criticism if they dress in a manner that's deemed too revealing or attractive."

Laws banning sex discrimination were supposed to put this problem to rest, according to the ACLU. In a landmark 1989 case, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Ann Hopkins, a woman who was told her "professional

problems would be solved if only she would "walk more femininely, talk more femininely, wear makeup, have her hair styled and wear jewelry." The court recognized that Hopkins, a senior manager, was stuck between a rock and a hard place — out of a job because she was considered "macho" and out of a job if she wasn't seen as macho enough.

"That decision established that employers can't punish employees because they don't match stereotypical notions about how women or men should look and act," Tabacco Mar said. "A growing number of lower courts have also recognized that federal law protects workers like Meagan who experience discrimination because of their sexual orientation."

Yet 30 years after Ann Hopkins's case, Hunter still found herself out of a job because she didn't fit her company's stereotypes about what it means to be a woman. That's why the ACLU filed a charge of discrimination against Chili's with the EEOC.

"When employers punish workers for who they are and what they look like, they lose valuable people like Meagan. That's not only wrong and bad for business — it's also against the law," said Tabacco Mar.

## Supreme Court Cases

"These cases illustrate that LGBTQ people face disproportionate rates of workplace discrimination," Tabacco Mar said. "In the past two decades, courts around the country have recognized that discrimination because someone is LGBTQ is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by civil rights laws, yet the Trump administration has argued that federal law doesn't protect LGBTQ people and that companies are free to fire workers because they are LGBTQ."

## Altitude Express, Inc. v. Zarda

Zarda v. Altitude Express, Inc. is a case concerning employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. After revealing his sexual orientation to a customer at the skydiving

business where he worked in Long Island, New York, Don Zarda was fired. The termination followed a history of anti-gay encounters from the employer. Zarda sued under the New York Human Rights Law, which explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, and under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

## Bostock v. Clayton County

Gerald Lynn Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia is a case concerning employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. Bostock was fired from his position as child welfare services coordinator with CASA in June 2013. His legal team contends that his firing is a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits sex discrimination, and which the legal team argues applies to sexual orientation.

## R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes, Inc. v. EEOC and Aimee Stephens

EEOC v. Harris Family Funeral Homes is a case concerning employment discrimination based on gender identity or expression. The case dates back to 2014, when Aimee Stephens claimed that her former employer, Harris Funeral Homes, violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act by discriminating against her because of her gender identity. She filed a complaint with the EEOC, and the EEOC subsequently filed a federal lawsuit against the employer. The case argues, as many courts have ruled in the past, that existing federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination based on sex also extend to discrimination based on gender identity.

The Supreme Court has yet to announce if they will take the cases about federal workplace protections and LGBTQ people. If the court decides to hear these cases, oral arguments would likely be scheduled for the fall 2019 term.

# White House Mum on Trump's Anti-LGBT Meeting With Ginni Thomas

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

The White House remains silent on President Trump's reported meeting with anti-LGBT activist Ginni Thomas, the spouse of conservative U.S. Associate Justice Clarence Thomas, despite objections from LGBT rights advocates who say the meeting was inappropriate.

On Monday during the regular news briefing, White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders ignored the Washington Blade, which was prepared to ask questions about the discussion. (The White House spokesperson has declined to call on the Blade for more than a year.) No other media outlet asked about the meeting.

The New York Times reported over the weekend that Trump met last week with anti-LGBT activists led by Thomas in the Roosevelt Room of the White House. During the meeting, Trump was reportedly "listening quietly" as members of the group denounced transgender people serving in the U.S. military.

The meeting came the same week the U.S. Supreme Court issued a stay on court orders barring enforcement of his transgender military ban, essentially allowing the anti-trans policy to go into effect.

In addition to decrying transgender military service, the anti-LGBT activists said women shouldn't serve in the military "because they had less muscle mass and lung capacity than men." They also said the Supreme Court ruling for marriage equality is "harming the fabric of the United States" and sexual assault isn't pervasive in the military, according to the New York Times.

The New York Times reported the White House didn't respond to a request to comment on the meeting for the article, nor did Thomas.

Jennifer Pizer, law and policy director at Lambda Legal, said the meeting between Thomas and Trump was concerning.

"It is no secret that Justice Thomas's Supreme Court opinions often embrace the most extreme of far-right-wing perspectives, and routinely work to erode the wall of separation between church and state," Pizer said. "But while the reactionary nature of his approach is well known, it's still shocking to hear that his wife is leading a delegation of religious and political extremists in overt, aggressive political lobbying of the president on issues actually pending before the Supreme Court at this very moment."

It's not unusual for Trump to meet with anti-LGBT activists. For example, last year, heads of anti-LGBT advocacy groups met with Trump in the White House after he announced his decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to

Jerusalem. Afterwards, those leaders emerged from the White House to thank Trump for anti-LGBT policies, such as the ban on transgender military service and "religious freedom" orders seen to enable anti-LGBT discrimination.

As the Blade has reported, Trump's meetings with anti-LGBT advocacy groups represent the restored influence of those organizations after they were shut out for eight years during the Obama administration.

Some have criticized the Thomas meeting as inappropriate not just because anti-LGBT policies were discussed, but also because a sitting U.S. president shouldn't meet with the spouse of a justice on the Supreme Court.

Pizer said the meeting between the spouse of a Supreme Court justice and Trump smacks of a violation of separation of powers.

"One of the most fundamental principles of our constitutional system is that the three branches of government must be independent of each other, with the Supreme Court charged to check and correct unconstitutional actions of the political branches," Pizer said. "The court is not to be just one more political branch. Although we all know that reality sometimes falls short of that principle, every Supreme Court justice must nonetheless take proper steps to maintain the appearance of impartiality. It is truly appalling to see such a brazen violation of that basic standard."

Sarah Kate Ellis, CEO of the LGBT media watchdog group GLAAD, is calling on the White House to issue "official bookkeeping notes" on the meeting.

"The fact that President Trump is taking counsel from known anti-LGBTQ activists like Ginni Thomas regarding policies that could impact LGBTQ people and families should have Americans gravely concerned about the foundations of our government, and they deserve to see the official notes that came from that meeting," Ellis said. "LGBTQ people know President Trump wants to roll back their hard-fought progress, but this clear display of coordination between the executive branch and the wife of a U.S. Supreme Court justice shows Americans the Trump administration will do anything to push an agenda — even if it means shredding the checks and balances system."

The Washington Blade has submitted several questions to the White House via email on the meeting and will update this story as appropriate.

*This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National Gay Media Association.*

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# WANDA SYKES

- IS AS -

# PUZZLED

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## Comedian Talks New Standup, Walkouts and Ellen's Interview with Kevin Hart

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

**B**ecause according to Trump's America only white het men can exist, now would be a good time to reintroduce Wanda Sykes. She is a black person and a woman and a lesbian.

And if you go to one of her "Oh Well" stand-up shows this year, or catch the taping of one on Netflix tentatively scheduled to stream later this year, expect a poking and probing of things affecting Americans who identify as any of those under-attack minorities. Some women who are still supporting Trump for some reason may have benefited from that very basic Wanda Sykes 101 bio above before seeing the actress-comedian-writer in New Jersey in September 2018 and walking out and *then* demanding a refund from the Count Basie Center for the Arts.

These are the same people who loved the 54-year-old comedian in "Monster-in-Law" and "Evan Almighty" and as the voice of an animated skunk in "Over the Hedge." And the same people who then wondered what the problem was when Roseanne tweeted a racist tweet and why Sykes, who wrote for the "Roseanne" revival, jumped ship.

Not that the entertainer and mom-to-twins didn't have a loaded sched, but with recurring TV roles on "Broad City" and "Black-ish" (for which she was Emmy-nominated), and several new movies out this year, Sykes has somehow found the time and energy to rattle the privileged cages of Trump supporters.

**Are you unfazed by walkouts at this point in your career?**

It cracks me up, really. Like, what were you expecting? What are the crazy ladies' names? Diamond and whatever? The two African-American women. I forget their names. Diamond and Salt? Silk? (*Editor's note: It's Diamond and Silk, vloggers known for supporting Donald Trump.*) It's like, no, that's not me.

**Or Kanye West.**

Right, right, right.

**At this point Trump is basically writing his own comedy show. Recently, there was a photo**





## INFO

### Wanda Sykes

8 p.m. Feb. 9, Music Hall  
350 Madison St., Detroit  
musichall.org

#### of him standing in front of a Burger King and McDonald's buffet at the White House.

It's hard to top him.

#### When the fodder is ripe for comedy is it actually harder to write the joke?

Yeah, it's hard to top as far as what he does, because it's just so ridiculous. Like when he does something ridiculous, it's hard to write something where you would go, "That's like blah blah blah," because it's already ridiculous. It's hard to do a metaphor. So, really, you just have to talk about it as far as the level that it's gotten to, and I don't understand why we're still putting up with it. Why aren't we out in the streets, and you know, ready to drag him out of there, out of the White House? Because remember they got upset with Barack Obama when he wore a tan suit? I mean, this is ridiculous, the level that they're going to.

#### Do you remember your first walkout and what that was like?

I got walkouts back under the George W. Bush administration. There were some walkouts back then. So, I've gotten used to it.

#### I think I read that during one of your first shows in the late '80s, the audience booed you.

That was the second one. The first one I did went great. I almost won the contest; I did really well. So that's why I stayed with comedy. And then the second time, it didn't go well. I just bombed (laughs). I think because I was just so confident from the first time that I maybe (got) a little too cocky. Actually, I think it was the first time being on stage and it went great, and then I started going to comedy clubs and I saw how it could actually go really poorly and just go off the rails. I watched comics bomb and then when I went back on stage again I was just really nervous because I realized they don't have to laugh; they can actually sit here and boo. So, I think that's what happened the next time I did the competition.

#### What is one thing you want people to take away from "Oh Well"?

I hope they take away that I haven't lost hope. That I still believe that people are good and that we'll get through this, so I hope they walk away with that. Like, I'm not saying, "Hey, it's the end of the world."

#### Where are you deriving that hope from?

Young people. They give me hope. The Parkland kids, they do, they give me hope.

#### Through your involvement with the Ruth Ellis Center for homeless and at-risk LGBTQ youth in

#### Detroit, you've met a lot of young people. What do young LGBTQ people want to know about Wanda Sykes?

A lot of it is career-wise, 'cause a lot of them, man, they're so talented, they're very creative, a lot of the kids from the center. So a lot of them want to know how I got started and any advice career-wise, and then of course how hard was it coming out and do I think that it had an effect on my career and also advice on dealing with family members as far as having problems dealing with coming out. (Laughs) Sometimes it's just, "Hey, what do you like to do for fun? When you get stumped creatively, what do you do to get out of it?"

#### What do you do to get out of it?

You know what, I like jigsaw puzzles. (Laughs) I know I sound like an old lady! But every now and then if I gotta break it up and nothing is coming to me and I get stuck in a rut, I like to break out a jigsaw puzzle and maybe put some music on, something I don't normally listen to. You just need a shift. As soon as you make a shift, it opens everything back up for you.

#### What's the last jigsaw puzzle you completed?

It was a cover from the New Yorker and it was a dog sitting on porch steps.

#### So you're a dog puzzle person?

(Laughs) Nah, it's not a lot of abstract stuff I do. I like a piece of art, or you know, it's usually still life.

#### Do you do the 5,000-piece puzzles or are you more of a 300-piece puzzle person?

Usually it's more like 2,500. Five-thousand, that's a project for over the summer.

#### Who do you test your material out on?

Pretty much the audience. My wife can see when something happens, and if I write it down or she sees something in my phone she's like, "Oh boy, that's a joke for you now." Or something happens and she'll say, "Oh, you should write that down! That was funny!"

#### How were you writing your material before cell phones?

I always had a notebook and always wrote things down in my notebook. I have boxes and boxes of notebooks where I used to write my stuff down. Now it goes in the phone, but I still like to write by hand.

#### Will your Netflix show be out this year?

I'm shooting it in February, so it'll probably be out late spring.

#### Will that be the "Oh Well" show? Will it be as anti-Trump as the show you're currently touring now?

(Laughs) I would say the first 15 minutes or so – 20 minutes – is that. But then I move on! The tour that I'm doing now, that will be the special I'm working on.

See **Wanda Sykes**, continued on p. 18

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## ► Wanda Sykes

Continued from p. 17

**The Guardian called it a “tough anti-Trump tirade.” Is it scary to talk about Trump because of what happened to Kathy Griffin?**

No, I think we see that Kathy was right. I think she was just a little ahead of us as far as where this was going.

**Right as far as her lambasting of the president?**

Right.

**Do you feel you have a greater responsibility now to speak on political and social issues?**

I talk about what interests me and what I find funny and what I like to talk about. I watch politics, I follow what's happening in the world. I like to talk about social issues and I like to talk about my family and personal issues. To me, I'm not going out of the way to say, “Oh, I need 10 minutes on Trump, I need something on gun control.” That's not how I write, it's not planned. It's what happened. And that's the kind of comedy I like. There's room for all types of comedy; there's physical humor and there's some comics who are not political at all and that's fine. But for me, if I walked out onto a stage and didn't say anything about this craziness that's happening, it'd be like the elephant in the room. I think when I go on stage people

are waiting for it. Like, “Oh, OK, when is she going to get there?”

**It's affecting everything you stand for, so how could you not?**

For me, I believe that's the job for an artist. But then again, there are all types of artists and comics out there.

**Ellen's recent interview with Kevin Hart upset many people in the LGBTQ community. She was criticized for making Kevin out to be the victim, while muting the voice of her own community. Don Lemon was one of her critics. Where do you stand on how that interview went?**

I looked at it as two comedians who are friends and she was trying to help out her friend. Now, I agree with Don Lemon that there is a huge issue in the African-American community concerning homosexuality and the LGBTQ community. So, I think for me, you'd have to go a little deeper with discussing that. To me, to say, “Hey, I already apologized and I didn't know about it until it came out this time around” – so, it's like, well, we didn't know about that and now we do, so where's the apology? Or at least have some type of awareness as far as how your words really are affecting a lot of kids in our community. So, I always gotta come on the side of kids and our community.

**People, including actress-writer Lena Waithe, have been expressing a desire to see you as Oscar host. Would you be interested?**

If they asked, yeah, I would be interested.

**You're not busy doing a puzzle that night?**

(Laughs) I got a nice gay flag puzzle that I wanna work on so, um...

**Wanda, bring the gay puzzle to the Oscars and work on it there.**

(Laughs) I mean, it's the Oscars, so I wouldn't run away from it. But it would be cool if they made it very inclusive and made RuPaul host.

**Regarding your acting career: Have you had the acting career that you always desired to have?**

Well, I never really desired to have an acting career. I just wanted to be one of the funniest comedians out there and wanted to make a living traveling all over, and film and TV is a bonus, really. I mean, come on, I got to go to Hawaii to shoot a movie with Amy (Schumer). But to me, I take it seriously, though; I also just love doing it. I love stand-up.

**You have several films slated for release this year, including “Friendsgiving” and “The Wedding Year.” In “Friendsgiving” you play what must be a dream role: the fairy gay mother. How does one get the role of the fairy gay mother?**

You're just blessed with a role like that. You

get a call and you're blessed and it's like, “Hey, you're the fairy gay mother with Margaret Cho and Fortune Feimster.”

**Do you get a magic wand?**

I'm not gonna tell you if I get a magic wand or not. But there are wings involved!

**If you had a magic wand, how would you use it?**

Oh, boy. I can do a lot of things though, right?

**You're like Cinderella's fairy godmother. You just wave that wand around, and if you want you can turn Trump into a horse.**

(Laughs) Well, he's already a jackass.

**And you don't even need a wand for that.**

Don't even need it. Wow, what would I do? I think first I would make Oprah the president, and then I'd do something about guns, and then I'll make sure that Flint has clean water. I'll do that.

*As editor of Q Syndicate, the international LGBTQ wire service, Chris Azzopardi has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in GQ, Vanity Fair and Billboard. Reach him via his website at [www.chris-azzopardi.com](http://www.chris-azzopardi.com) and on Twitter (@chrisazzopardi).*

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# Jim Toy Community Center Provides Name Change Clinic Feb. 16



*Hello, my  
name is...*

FREE LEGAL NAME CHANGE CLINIC

Taking place in the basement conference room of the Washtenaw County Clerk's office, on Saturday, Feb. 16, from 1 to 3:30 p.m., experts at the Jim Toy Community Center will provide information on how to change one's name and gender marker in the state of Michigan.

"We're excited to offer this special event during LGBTQ+ Health and Wellness week! Join JTCC's Know Your Rights Project and the Outlaws of the University of Michigan Law School for a free clinic dedicated to addressing the challenges of name changes for transgender and gender nonconforming people," write event organizers. "[There will also be] information on how to update your social security, passport, driver's license and birth certificate will also

be available. Legal volunteers will be on-site after the presentation to answer questions and assist with forms."

Center officials say that Washtenaw County residents may be eligible for full in-court representation and assistance with fees paid for through the Know Your Rights Project.

*The Washtenaw County Clerk building is located at 200 N. Main St. in Ann Arbor, two blocks away from the Jim Toy Community Center. Find more information online on the Center's Facebook or by going online to jimtoycenter.org.*

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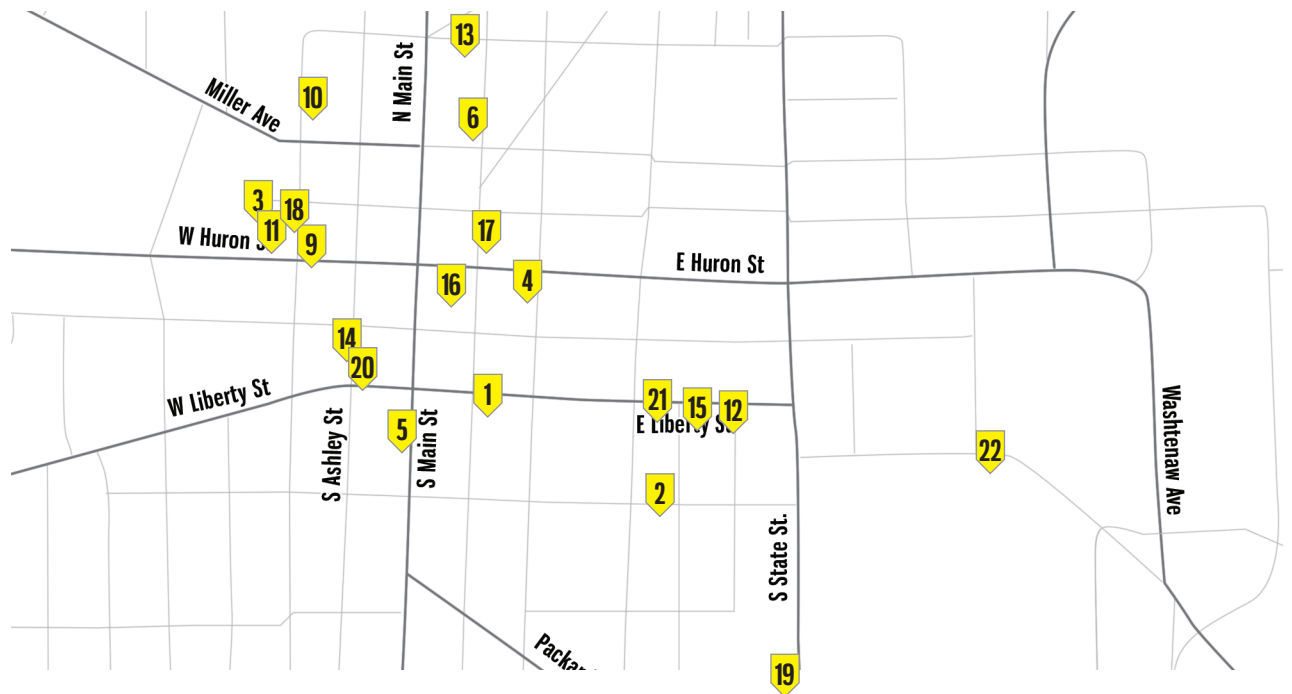
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# Happenings



## Sarah Brightman to Perform at Fox Theatre

Having collected almost 200 awards globally for gold and platinum records, Grammy Award-nominated singer Sarah Brightman's career is among the most illustrious in the world. On Feb. 13, Detroit fans can see her live as she stops by on her "Hymn" tour along with tenor Vincent Niclo and countertenor Narcis Iustinianu. Tickets start at \$50. Find out more at [ticketmaster.com](http://ticketmaster.com)

## OUTINGS

### Saturday, February 2

**LGBT Community Chat** 11 a.m. Saturday LGBT Chat is an on going social discussion group meets every week to discuss issues LGBT people face. Coming out, dating, and much more. Java Hut Ferndale Michigan, 165 W 9 Mile, Ferndale. [redbellyseagal90@gmail.com](mailto:redbellyseagal90@gmail.com)

**The House on Poe Street at The Detroit Repertory Theatre** 3 p.m. Gothic ghosts encounter modern monstrosities when twin sisters inherit the house where Poe is reputed to have composed The Raven.

What ensues is a feminist sci-fi fantasy that explores presumptions of wealth, gender parity. Detroit Repertory Theatre, 13103 Woodrow Wilson, Detroit. 313-868-1347 [www.detroitreptheatre.com](http://www.detroitreptheatre.com)

**Stop Kiss** 8 p.m. A powerful play that showcases friendship and an attraction that leads to a kiss between two women. The tragic consequences of their kiss serve as both an indictment of hatred and a moving study. Peace Lutheran Church, 17029 W. 13 MILE RD., SOUTHFIELD. (313)532-4010 [www.rosedalecommunityplayers.com](http://www.rosedalecommunityplayers.com)

### Sunday, February 3

**Stand with Trans Wyandotte Support Group for Trans Youth and Parents of Trans Individuals** 4 p.m. There is no fee to attend the groups. This group meets the 1st and 3rd Sundays of each month @ St. Stephens Episcopal Church. For Parent Support Group information, contact facilitator Kim Tooley, 734-747-4363. St. Stephens Episcopal Church, 2803 1st Street, Wyandotte. 734-747-4363 [www.standwithtrans.org](http://www.standwithtrans.org)

**Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups – Adrian-Lenawee County** 6:30 p.m. FREE and OPEN to the community. For parents of transgender kids, this group meets the 1st Sunday of each month @ Hilltop Counseling For Trans Youth

Support Group information, contact facilitator Socorro Sevilla, MSW: [socorro@hilltopcounseling.org](mailto:socorro@hilltopcounseling.org) Hilltop Counseling, 115 W. Maumee Street, Adrian. 313-909-5408 [www.standwithtrans.org](http://www.standwithtrans.org) [www.hilltopcounseling.org](http://www.hilltopcounseling.org)

### Monday, February 4

**LGBT Game Night** 7 p.m. LGBT Game Night is an opportunity for all LGBT people and allies to come play a board game, drink coffee and socialize with other LGBT individuals. Java Hut, 165 W Nine Mile, Ferndale. [redbellyseagal90@gmail.com](mailto:redbellyseagal90@gmail.com)

### Tuesday, February 5

**Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups – Lake Orion / Oakland County** 7 p.m. FREE and OPEN to the community. For parents of transgender kids, this group meets the 1st Tuesday of each month @ St. Mary's In-the-Hills Episcopal Church. Parent Support Group Facilitated by Lisa Goyette, ally, activist, St. Mary's In The Hills Episcopal Church, 2512 Joslyn Court, Lake Orion. 248-391-0663 [www.stmarysinthehills.org](http://www.stmarysinthehills.org) <http://www.standwithtrans.org>

### Wednesday, February 6

**Affirmations Senior Koffee Clatch!** 1 p.m. A discussion and networking group for people 45 and older. Various discussion topics, social outings, and potlucks are held throughout the year. With age comes wisdom but, for LGBTQ seniors, loneliness can often come along. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105 [www.goaffirmations.org](http://www.goaffirmations.org)

**Rainbow League Bowling!** 7 p.m. This is a fun bowling league and provides a great opportunity for anybody to become acquainted with bowling. The 2018-2019 season celebrates our 26th season. Lodge Lanes, 46255 S. I-94 Service Drive, Belleville. 734-697-9178 [info@a2bowling.com](mailto:info@a2bowling.com) [www.rainbowbowlingleague.com](http://www.rainbowbowlingleague.com)

### Thursday, February 7

**Juliana Huxtable** 5 p.m. The iconic Juliana Huxtable is an American artist, writer, performer, and musician. Exploring the intersections of race, gender, queerness, technology, and identity, Huxtable uses a diverse set of means to engage these issues, including self-portraiture. Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397

**Pride Night at Thunderbowl!** 7 p.m. Meet & Greet First Thursday of every month, unlimited bowling, shoe rental, private room, private bar area, drink specials, billiard room, 250 foot video wall. Come as you are!! Thunderbowl Arena, 4200 Allen Road, Allen Park. 313-928-4688 [www.thunderbowl.org/](http://www.thunderbowl.org/) <http://www.thunderbowl.org/>

### Saturday, February 9

**Wanda Sykes at the Detroit Music Hall** 8 p.m. An American actress, comedian, and writer, she was first recognized for her work as a writer on The Chris Rock Show, for which she won a Primetime Emmy Award in 1999. 8 pm Detroit Music Hall, 350 Madison St., Detroit. 313-887-8501 [www.musicall.org](http://www.musicall.org)

### Cougar Hunt Presented by Tito's Handmade Vodka

8 p.m. All you sexy cougars come out for a fun night to crown Ferndale's Queen Cougar for 2019. Any ladies interested in strutting their stuff for Ferndale Pride, come on out! Winner receives prizes and becoming Soho, 205 W. 9 Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-542-7646 [www.ferndalesoho.com](http://www.ferndalesoho.com) [www.titosvodka.com](http://www.titosvodka.com)

### Monday, February 11

**Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups – Macomb County** 6:30 p.m. Macomb Teen/Youth Support Group: All youth are welcome to attend this FREE group. Come and meet other trans\* youth and teens and support each other through your journeys. Dakota High School, 21051 21 Mile Road, Macomb. 586-723-2700 <http://www.chippewavalley.schools.org/schools/high-schools/dhs/>

### Tuesday, February 12

**Serving Up Knowledge: Queering Black History Month** 12 p.m. Bring a lunch and join us for our session on Queering Black History Month. Open to all OU students! OC Rooms 128-129, . . . [gsc@oakland.edu](mailto:gsc@oakland.edu) [gsc@oakland.edu](http://gsc@oakland.edu)

### Wednesday, February 13

**Stand with Trans Youth Support Group – Flint – Genesee** 6:30 p.m. Free to all, Trans Youth Support Group meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month @ Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Flint. Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Flint, 2474 S. Ballenger Hwy, Flint. 810-232-4023 [uufint.org](http://uufint.org) [www.standwithtrans.org](http://www.standwithtrans.org)

### Thursday, February 14

**Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups – Farmington Hills – Oakland County** 7 p.m. All youth are welcome to attend this FREE group. This group meets the 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month at Orchard United Methodist Church, 30450 Farmington Road, Farmington. 248-626-3620 [www.oaklandumc.org](http://www.oaklandumc.org) [www.standwithtrans.org](http://www.standwithtrans.org)

**Toastmasters International SpeakOUT! LGBTQ Meeting** 7 p.m. Professional & personal communication skills development. With better communications skills, you'll better your leadership style as well as your relationships. Warm & welcoming members. Find out what Toastmasters can do for you. Jim Toy Community Center, 319 Braun Court, Ann Arbor. 734-995-9867 <https://speakout.toastmastersclubs.org>

### Tuesday, February 19

**Dispelling Myths about Smoking, Mental Health/Substance Use Disorders and Recovery** 7:30 p.m. People with mental health or substance use disorder can quit tobacco use. St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Education Center Auditorium, 5305 Elliott Drive, Ypsilanti. 734-485-8725 [www.dawnfarm.org/programs/education-series](http://www.dawnfarm.org/programs/education-series)

### Wednesday, February 20

**Stand with Trans Support Groups – Livonia – Wayne County** 6:30 p.m. Free to all, group meets the 3rd Wednesday of each month. Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 34567 7 Mile Road, Livonia. [www.standwithtrans.org](http://www.standwithtrans.org)

### Thursday, February 21

**Clyde Petersen** 5 p.m. A Seattle-based artist working in film, animation, music, installation and spectacle. A proud member of the transgender and queer communities in Seattle, Petersen's work explores identity and narrative form. Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 [https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/clyde\\_petersen](https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/clyde_petersen)

### Saturday, February 23

**Erotic Poetry and Music Festival at Tangent Gallery** 8 p.m. Come join us for an eclectic celebration of the erotic arts all in one evening! Featuring poetry, art, music, burlesque and more! Tangent Gallery, 715 East Milwaukee Ave., Detroit. [www.facebook.com/EroticPoetryandMusicFestival](http://www.facebook.com/EroticPoetryandMusicFestival)

### Tuesday, February 26

**Stand with Trans Support Groups – Ann Arbor – Washtenaw** 6:30 p.m. Trans Support Group meeting the 4th Tuesday of each month @ Journey of Faith Christian Church. An event every month at 6:30 pm Journey of Faith Christian Church, 1900 Manchester Road, Ann Arbor. [www.standwithtrans.org](http://www.standwithtrans.org)

## MUSIC & MORE

**Detroit Zoo Kicks Off Wild Winter Weekends** Feb. 2, 10 a.m. Embrace the winter weather this season during our Wild Winter weekends at the Detroit Zoo! A fun way to experience the magic of the Zoo in winter. The Detroit Zoo, 8450 W. 10 Mile Road, Royal Oak. <https://detroitzoo.org>

**Kaki King + Strings** Feb. 5, 7 p.m. Hailed by Rolling Stone, as "a genre unto herself," composer and guitarist Kaki King returns with a special program featuring a DSO string ensemble. The Cube, 3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit. [www.dso.org](http://www.dso.org)

**53rd Annual Detroit RV and Camping Show** Feb. 6, 2 p.m. The Michigan Association of Recreation Vehicles and Campgrounds is sponsoring the show. All types of recreation vehicles, nearly 400 RVs, will be displayed. Suburban Collection Showplace, 46100 Grand River Ave., Novi. [www.marvac.org](http://www.marvac.org)

**Jazz & Soul Singer Sky Covington & Club Crescendo Live Every Thursday Night** Feb. 7, 9 p.m. Northern Lights Lounge Proudly Presents Neo Soul & Jazz Cabaret w/Sky Covington. Northern Lights Lounge, 660 W. Baltimore, Detroit. [northernlightslounge.com](http://northernlightslounge.com)

**A John Williams Celebration!** Feb. 9-10, 8 p.m. For five decades, Leonard Slatkin has championed the diverse music of America. Ferde Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-576-5111 [www.dso.org](http://www.dso.org)

**Carrie Mae Weems** Feb. 14, 5 p.m. For over thirty years Carrie Mae Weems, through the use of image, text, film, and video, has created a complex body of work that centers on her overarching commitment to helping us better understand our Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 [https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/carrie\\_mae\\_weems](https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/carrie_mae_weems)

**Appalachian Spring** Feb. 14, 7:30 p.m. In the second week of programs highlighting American music, Leonard Slatkin leads Adagios for Strings by Samuel Barber and Cindy McTee, Copland's Appalachian Spring, and Leonard Bernstein "Age of Anxiety" Symphony, along with an all-Gershwin 3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit. [www.dso.org](http://www.dso.org)

**Wanted Dead or Alive** Feb. 15, 7 p.m. The Experts in Mystery Entertainment are now performing live public and private interactive murder mystery dinner

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# BTL Reporter Releases First Novel

Essence Bestselling Author  
Jason A. Michael Publishes  
'Easier Said,' Book Signing Feb. 9

BY ADDISON SCOTT

Jason A. Michael has a long history with *Between The Lines*. In fact, he started writing for the paper in 1999, less than 10 years into its history. But if 20 years seems like a long time, consider this: Michael wrote the bulk of his novel, "Easier Said," released this month on his own JAM Books imprint, even before he started writing for the paper. Now, Michael is gearing up for a book release party to be held on Saturday, Feb. 9 at The Charlevoix Gallery in Detroit. BTL caught up with him to get details on his newly released work and upcoming projects.

For Michael, a native Detroit, the "Easier Said" story begins in Miami. Three days after graduating high school in 1990, Michael flew to live in the city. He lived there for seven years before returning to Michigan, and he still considers Miami his second home. It was there and then that Jason not only got some of the inspiration for the work, but when he wrote much of "Easier Said."

"Years before the internet, Match.com or Plenty of Fish, I met a young man who lived in Miami on a phone chat line," Michael said. "I flew down to meet him for spring break of my senior year and fell in love with both the boy and the city."

Michael's novel is loosely based on his experiences in the Magic City and tells the story of an interracial relationship between Jordan Bradley, who works for sensational disco diva Rhaynetta Hughes, and Khalil Kendrick, Hughes's nephew. The relationship is fraught with challenges from the start. While he falls in love with Jordan, the street-smart Khalil does not consider himself to be gay. Still, the attraction between the two is both undeniable and highly combustible.

"While I did draw from personal experience, as most writers do, I am not Jordan and this is not the story of my life," Michael said. "Still, I look back at the years I spent in Miami as some of the best of my life and I enjoyed writing about the sights and sounds of the city and some of my favorite places there."

Most of the book, which Michael left set during the same period in which he lived in Miami, was written while Michael was working as a relay operator for the deaf during 1995 and 1996.

"I came home to Detroit in 1997 and basically finished the book here," Michael said.

"I shopped it around for a while but found that most publishers of gay fiction at the time were looking for gay erotica. Make no mistake, there is sex in the book – some hot sex, if I do say so myself – but the book is not erotic fiction. It's simply, as I say in press materials, the story of an unlikely love."

When asked why he didn't release the book in the '90s, Michael said that over the years he would pull "Easier Said" off the shelf of his office and do a little tinkering with it.

"The book has been edited and edited and edited some more," he said. "And I had several preliminary readers who gave me great feedback."

Despite that positive reinforcement, Michael never released the book. Instead, after racking up a Spirit of Detroit

Award from the Detroit City Council and the Community Pride Banquet Media Award for his work with *Between The Lines*, Michael started working on a new project: "Strength of Woman: The Phyllis Hyman Story." The story is the authorized biography of the beloved late singer that took Michael approximately five years to write.

"The Phyllis Hyman Story' was a true labor of love and I have made it my mission to promote Phyllis and her legacy," Michael said. "After being forced to release the book myself, I was thrilled when it became an *Essence* magazine bestseller."

However, Michael said he isn't motivated by the success of his last book or by any specific timing.

"There is no significance now as to why I'm releasing the book now, after all these years," Michael said. "I just felt it was now or never. ... Truly, 'Easier Said' is not the story I'd write now if I were to do another book. I suspect some folks might even be surprised by it when they read it. But despite being a work of fiction, there's a certain authenticity and truth about it. And I felt it still stood up after all these years."

When asked if he has plans to release another book in the future Michael said yes, but said he hopes it "won't be another 20 years before the next one comes out."

"God willing you'll hear more from me soon."

*Michael will read from and sign copies of his new novel and the recently re-released book at his event at The Charlevoix Gallery. It is located on Detroit's east side at 14505 Charlevoix St.*



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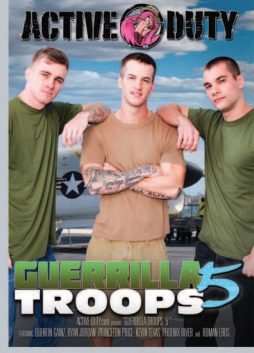
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## Editor's Pick



### The Real Drag Queens of Bingo at the Sanctuary

On Feb. 1 at Hamtramck's Sanctuary Detroit, locals are invited to The Real Drag Queens of Bingo to watch three drag queen hosts present a bingo night like they've never seen before. Doors open at 6 p.m. Find tickets online at [sanctuarydetroit.com](http://sanctuarydetroit.com).

shows in Livonia and surrounding areas throughout Michigan. Burton Manor, 27777 Schoolcraft Rd, Livonia Rd. <https://www.grimprov.com>

**In the Mood for Swing!** Feb. 16, 7:30 p.m. Swing into Valentine's weekend, paint the town red and get ready to bop as the Michigan Phil takes you back to the age of swing! Vocalist Lauren Norris will join the orchestra sharing music from The Village Theater at Cherry Hill, 50400 Cherry Hill Road, Canton. [www.cantonvillage.com](http://www.cantonvillage.com)

**Flint Symphony Orchestra Presents 'Beethoven's No. 5 Destiny Symphony'** February 23, 8 a.m. Enrique Diemecke, conductor; Anthony Elliott, cello; Cheyanne Coss, voice; Beethoven, Barber, Bloch. Cheyanne Coss appears courtesy of St. Cecilia Society, host of the William C. Byrd Young Artist Competition. Pre-concert talks at 6:30, these fun and informative talks take the mystery Flint Institute of Music, 1025 E. Kearsley Street, Flint. 810-238-1350 <https://thefim.org> <https://thefso.org>

**Cabaret 313 Presents Carole J. Bufford** Feb. 23, 6:30 p.m. With music made famous by Janis Joplin, Dusty Springfield, Tina Turner, Carole King and more, Carole J. Bufford returns for her third performance with Cabaret 313 - You Don't Own Me: Detroit Institute of Arts, 2100 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-833-7900 <http://cabaret313.org>

**Shen Yun Performing Arts at the Detroit Opera House** March 1, 7:30 p.m. Shen Yun invites you to travel back to the magical world of ancient China. Experience a lost culture through the incredible art of classical Chinese dance, and see legends come to life. Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway St., Detroit. 313-237-SING [www.shenyun.com](http://www.shenyun.com)

**90th Annual Spring Dance Concert at The Bonstelle** March 1, 7:30 p.m. Celebrate our 90th Anniversary of Dance at Wayne with this thrilling weekend at the Bonstelle Theatre. Join us as we highlight national and international works from top-performing artists. With only two performances, you don't want to One event on March 2 at 7:30pm Bonstelle Theatre, 3424 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-577-2960 [www.theatreanddanceatwayne.com](http://www.theatreanddanceatwayne.com)

**Midwest RAD Fest** March 6. The 10th Anniversary Midwest RAD Fest is a juried contemporary dance festival which will feature over 200 professional dance artists from all over the world. All events are open to the public. The Epic Center, 359 S. Kalamazoo Mall, Kalamazoo, MI. 269-342-4354 [rachel@wellspringdance.org](http://www.rachel@wellspringdance.org) <http://www.midwestradfest.org>

## ART 'N' AROUND

**Carrie Mae Weems** February 14, 5 p.m. For over thirty years Carrie Mae Weems, through the use of image, text, film, and video, has created a complex body of work that centers on her overarching commitment to helping us better understand our Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 [https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/carrie\\_mae\\_weems](https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/carrie_mae_weems)

**Clyde Petersen** February 21, 5 p.m. Clyde Petersen is a Seattle-based artist working in film, animation, music, installation, and spectacle. A proud member of the transgender and queer communities in Seattle, Petersen's work explores identity and narrative form. Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 [https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/clyde\\_petersen](https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/clyde_petersen)

**Erotic Poetry and Music Festival at Tangent Gallery** February 23, 8 p.m. Come join us for an eclectic celebration of the erotic arts all in one evening! Featuring poetry, art, music, burlesque and more! Tangent Gallery, 715 East Milwaukee Avenue, Detroit. 2484451277 <https://www.facebook.com/EroticPoetryandMusicFestival>

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## THEATER

**The Phantom of the Opera Returns!** Feb. 2, 2 p.m. Andrew Lloyd Webber's Critics are raving that this breathtaking production is "bigger and better than ever before". Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway St., Detroit. 313-237-SING [www.broadwayindetroit.com](http://www.broadwayindetroit.com)

**The House on Poe Street at The Detroit Repertory Theatre** Feb. 2, 3 p.m. Gothic ghosts encounter modern monstrosities when twin sisters inherit the house where Poe is reputed to have composed The Raven. Detroit Repertory Theatre, 13103 Woodrow Wilson, Detroit. 313-868-1347 [www.detroitreptheatre.com](http://www.detroitreptheatre.com)

**Williamston Theatre Presents 'To Quiet the Quiet'** Feb. 2, 3 p.m. Having suffered great loss and heartbreak in her life, Kathy, now middle-aged and alone, is a woman on the edge. Williamston Theatre, 122 S. Putnam Road [www.williamstontheatre.org](http://www.williamstontheatre.org)

**American Privilege** Feb. 2, 7:30 p.m. This unique theatrical event will use live experiences of our Detroit community to gain insight into how privilege has both oppressed and unified beautiful and complex identities in 21st Century America. The Marlene Boll Theatre, 1401 Broadway, Detroit. [www.detroitmercycarts.com](http://www.detroitmercycarts.com)

**Stagecrafters Presents If/Then** Feb. 2, 8 p.m. At the heart of every choice we've ever made lies this question. What if we had chosen differently? Baldwin Theatre, 415 South Lafayette, Royal Oak. [www.stagecrafters.org](http://www.stagecrafters.org)

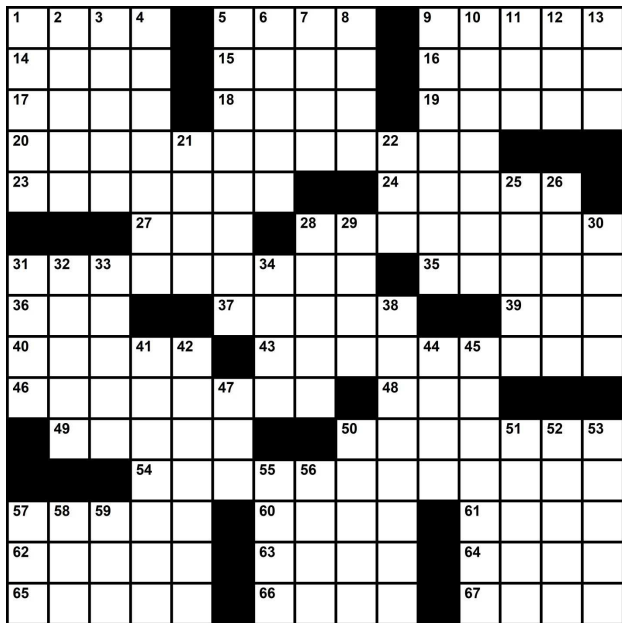
**THE HOW AND THE WHY by Sarah Treem Michigan Premiere** Feb. 2, 8 p.m. Two female evolutionary biologists share a bold, contrarian approach to their male-dominated field, but the younger scholar challenges the older woman's work with a radical new theory—one that could change society's basic understanding of female. Theatre NOVA, 410 W. Huron, Ann Arbor. [www.artful.ly/theatre-nova/store/events](http://www.artful.ly/theatre-nova/store/events)

**Reap the Grove by Caitly-Shea Violette** Feb. 2, 8 p.m. An estranged family reunites for their mother's final days. Reap The Grove is a poignant and darkly funny exploration of partnership, transgenerational trauma, and the anticipated grief of death with dignity. Matrix Theatre Company, 2730 Bagley St., Detroit. 313-967-0599 [www.matrixtheatre.org](http://www.matrixtheatre.org)

**Stop Kiss** Feb. 2, 8 p.m. A powerful play that showcases friendship and an attraction that leads to a kiss between two women. The tragic consequences of their kiss serve as both an indictment of hatred and a moving study. Peace Lutheran Church, 17029 W. 13 MILE RD., SOUTHFIELD. (313)532-4010 [staff@www.rosedalecommunityplayers.com/new\\_site/onlinetickets.htm](http://www.rosedalecommunityplayers.com/new_site/onlinetickets.htm)

**Angels in America - Parts I and II** Feb. 8. In this two-part epic, Prior Walter, a young man living in NYC in 1985, is diagnosed with AIDS. His boyfriend, Louis, struggling to cope with the disease and his own fears, abandons him. More information about this Hillbery Theatre, 4743 Cass Ave., Detroit. (313) 577-2972 <http://theatreanddance.wayne.edu/theatre>





- 36 "Got ya!"  
 37 Prepared, like fruit  
 39 Toto's home st.  
 40 Sounds like Harvey Fierstein?  
 43 Lucas Hedges flick about a mom and son struggling with drug addiction  
 46 Slaves row them for their masters  
 48 Maugham's "Cakes and \_\_\_\_"  
 49 Eat away at  
 50 Debbie Harry's old band  
 54 She plays the mom of Lucas Hedges in 43-Across  
 57 Mexican friend of Maya Angelou?  
 60 Like the 13 Amer. colonies  
 61 \_\_\_\_ up (come clean)  
 62 Dorothy, to Em  
 63 When doubled, Mork's good-bye  
 64 Isherwood's "\_\_\_\_ Camera"  
 65 Chat room request  
 66 On the calm side  
 67 Parker of "South Park"

## Hedges' Moms

## QPuzzle

### Across

- 1 Potent leader  
 5 Peter I, for one  
 9 It could explode in your mouth, in a gag  
 14 Brightly colored  
 15 Top drawer  
 16 Venue of "Spartacus"  
 17 Ron Howard film with Ellen DeGeneres  
 18 Winslet of "The Reader"

- 19 Type of call  
 20 She plays the mom of Lucas Hedges in 31-Across  
 23 Showy bloomers  
 24 Goes down  
 27 It connects Dick to Dyke  
 28 How a guy may approach his boyfriend?  
 31 Lucas Hedges movie about a family struggling with gay conversion  
 35 Hopkins of "Bosom Buddies"

### Down

- 1 Erect  
 2 Concern of GLAAD and NLGJA  
 3 Lumberjack's first cut  
 4 Entail  
 5 Enjoy a bed, perhaps  
 6 Emulates three men in a tub  
 7 Opposition member  
 8 Clarinet part  
 9 Minnelli hit of 1972  
 10 Hard shaft material

- 11 GM make  
 12 Aardvark entree  
 13 "Rebel Without a Cause" director Nicholas  
 21 One with a tricky tongue  
 22 Summer Billings hrs.  
 25 Kevin Isom's "It Only Hurts When I \_\_\_\_"  
 26 Singer Yma from Peru  
 28 Colette's fathers  
 29 Forbidden fruit site  
 30 Propane holder  
 31 One way to San Francisco  
 32 Midwest hub  
 33 Arafat once of Middle East politics  
 34 Know, to Frida  
 38 Much of many a Shakespearean play  
 41 "The Laramie \_\_\_\_"  
 42 Entices into the sack, perhaps  
 44 Neatnik's opposite  
 45 Live Aid, e.g.  
 47 Rev. White of Soulforce  
 50 Juice for your pickle  
 51 Dismal, to Dickinson  
 52 Lancelot's "C'est Moi," translated  
 53 Francis Bacon work  
 55 Island of Barrie's land  
 56 Russian inland sea  
 57 T or F, on exams  
 58 Problem of Harold in "The Boys in the Band"  
 59 Some like it hot

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## QTPOC Speaker Series at WSU

BY BTL STAFF

By hosting a QTPOC Speaker Series at Wayne State University, Cara Mitrano hopes to recognize and showcase the incredible leadership, activism and service of the community's LGBTQ siblings of color in Detroit.

"They have been doing this work for decades, often without the credit they deserve, and sometimes have to pay the price of violence and discrimination," said Mitrano, a senior undergraduate student at WSU and founder of the LGBT Student Advisory Board.

"By learning about the ongoing organizations and initiatives already happening around the city, WSU students, staff and faculty will be better able to leverage their skills and resources to amplify their impact."

Mitrano gained inspiration while attending Queering Racial Justice, an event hosted last September by the National LGBTQ Task Force, which centered the needs and experiences of QTPOC in the LGTBQ movement.

"Learning from so many amazing leaders of color and hearing how their experiences differed from my own gave me the idea to host a series of presentations by, for and/or about QTPOC," Mitrano said. "I chose February in honor of Black History Month and hope that the community, both on and off campus, joins me to celebrate through these events."

The QTPOC Speaker Series will be held at the WSU Student Center Building, 5221 Gullen Mall in Detroit.

Feb. 1, 7 p.m.  
Lower Level Stage  
Kickoff Jazz Concert with FCCB Small Ensemble

Feb. 4, 10 a.m.  
Hillberry A  
Hood Feminism with Dree Cooper and Fiyah Angelou

Feb. 6, 2 p.m.  
Hillberry A  
Welcoming LGBTQ Asylum Seekers with TJ Rogers

Feb. 9, 10 a.m.  
Hillberry D  
Power of Selfie Activism with Cassy Jones-McBryde

Feb. 13, 1 p.m.  
Hillberry A  
Historical Impact of Trauma on the Two-Spirit with Bridie Johnson

Feb. 20, 6 p.m.  
Hillberry A  
Being an Ally to Trans Women of Color with Julisa Abad

Feb. 25, 5 p.m.  
Hillberry A  
Empower and Resilience Workshop with Famika Edmond and Chunnika Hodges

For more information, please contact Cara Mitrano at ft9709@wayne.edu.

# Corktown Health Center Awarded \$500,000 Grant to Aid LGBTQ Elders

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The Michigan Health Endowment Fund recently awarded Corktown Health Center with a two-year \$500,000 grant to address the health needs of LGBTQ older adults in southeast Michigan. The grant will support the health center's Silver Rainbow Health Initiative, which is the first formal coordinated effort of its kind to help local LGBTQ elders.

"LGBT persons over 55 years old are less likely than their non-LGBT peers to have a primary care medical home and are more likely to suffer chronic illness and depression," said Corktown Health Center Medical Director Dr. LaTonya Riddle-Jones. "And since there is no formal effort to address health needs of LGBT older adults in southeast Michigan, we are thrilled to receive the financial support to launch our Silver Rainbow Health Initiative."

The Silver Rainbow Health Initiative program goals include providing integrated, community-based medical care and supportive services to LGBTQ persons over the age of 55; increasing the capacity of clinical and non-clinical service providers to deliver culturally appropriate services to LGBT older adults through provider education, training and networking; and promoting the health and service needs of LGBTQ older persons through data sharing, dialogue and dissemination of best practices.

Corktown Health Center will work in collaboration with SAGE Metro Detroit and Wayne State University School of Medicine on meeting the Silver Rainbow Health Initiative objectives.

"Decades of discrimination have made many LGBT older adults fearful of disclosing their identity and seeking out services," said SAGE Metro Detroit Executive Director Angie Perone. "[This] can contribute to social isolation and other negative health effects."

SAGE Metro Detroit will assist in implementing different programmatic initiatives as part of their contribution to the effort.

"We're going to be incorporating our SAGE Friendly Caller Program into that system to make sure that we are able to address social isolation," Perone continued. "We are able to take the lessons that we've learned from this program and incorporate it into the clinic and sort of make it stronger as well as allow it to serve more people."

SAGE Metro Detroit will also help with training a minimum of 15 organizations through this initiative.

"We're going to be releasing a novel, 12-module, e-learning program," Perone said. "We've already got the first six sets of modules done and we will be releasing them in early 2019. This training will give service providers the next steps to the one-on-one training. We're going to help service providers create inclusive policies, outreach materials and intake forms, as well as help them engage in inclusive phone calls and waiting room interactions."

## The Challenges of Seeking Health Care as an LGBTQ Older Adult

Judy Lewis is SAGE Metro Detroit's training and education manager. She is also an older LGBTQ adult.

"Most of my doctors – my OB-GYN, primary physician and

*"As an older adult with physical issues, living alone, it's more difficult to stand up to anger and bias."*

– Judy Lewis

dentist – have all retired and I've had to find new doctors," Lewis said. "I was out to my 'old' docs, but life is a bit different now. I have come out to two of them, but for some reason I have not been completely open with my dentist — and I'm pretty open. What do you suppose someone else, who isn't as open, might do? Or not do?"

Lewis added that in growing older, she has come to feel somewhat more vulnerable.

"When I was younger, stronger and in a relationship where I protected her and she protected me, I was far more apt to dismiss the negative actions and attitudes of 'conflicted heterosexuals,'" she said. "As an older adult with physical issues, living alone, it's more difficult to stand up to anger and bias. And the friends I consider family are the same age and in pretty much the same physical condition as me."

"There are folks who are afraid to come to Affirmations for fear of outing themselves," Lewis continued. "Our SAGE Friendly Caller Program came about because so many self-isolate. ... Although there has been much forward movement, it's still difficult for folks who grew up in my era."

Jim Sechelski is on SAGE Metro Detroit's board and is its vice-chair. Like Lewis, he also identifies as an LGBTQ older adult and said he understands the struggles she has faced.

"Coming out to my doctors doesn't get more difficult for me as I get older, because I have been out for so long," he said. "I actually enjoy choosing the moment at which to let the doctor or nurse know. But I understand that lots of folks in my generation or older are very fearful of having to disclose about themselves, because you never know how you'll be treated. For older LGBT folks, meeting a new doctor or going to a new medical office always brings up the questions: 'What do I need to tell them? How much do they need to know? Can I let down my guard with these people?' It's really hard to put into words the relief a person can feel when they don't have to worry about being out and can just be themselves."

Because being open to one's medical provider is important, Sechelski said the Silver Rainbow Health Initiative is appealing to him.

"I would be interested in a more LGBT-tailored care," he said. "I find that when my doctors and nurses have been gay-friendly and informed, or gay themselves, we can get to the treatment a lot faster, with less explaining. And I would never have to worry that someone's religious attitudes will affect my care, or, worse yet, that I'd be refused care. And that's really the heart of it: knowing that I'll be cared for no matter my identity or orientation."

To learn more visit [www.corktownhealth.org](http://www.corktownhealth.org) or call 313-8332-3300.



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