

TENNESSEE PASSES ANTI- DRAG BILL ON PUBLIC PROPERTY

By: Nicole Esteban



Tennessee becomes the first state to execute a law that specifically targets drag shows. State governor, Bill Lee, signed the bill last Thursday to ban any type of drag shows on public property, including any place where minors can physically watch. Senate Bill 3, the drag ban, is said to prohibit “adult cabaret performances” from taking action within 1,000 feet of public schools, parks, or places of worship (churches, mosques, synagogues, etc.).

The bill states that it includes “topless dancers, go-go dancers, exotic dancers, strippers, male or female impersonators,” and those who violate the new law will be charged with a misdemeanor, which can include a sentence of up to a year in state or federal prison and a \$2,500 fine. The new law, which will be effective starting April 1, has spurred numerous Republicans and GOP lawmakers to introduce various bills to tear down the performances that they call “offensive and inappropriate for kids.” Senate Leader Jack Johnson (R) sponsored Senate Bill 3 in “order to protect our children from drag shows that are sexual in nature.”

Though the drag law was also intended as a push by Republicans to eliminate such shows across the nation, famous drag queens such as RuPaul have responded to the matter: “Hey, look over there! A classic distraction technique, distracting us away from the real issues that they were voted into office to focus on: jobs, healthcare, keeping our children safe from harm at their own school,” RuPaul said. “But we know that bullies are incompetent at solving real issues. They look for easy targets so they can give the impression of being effective. They think our love, our light, our laughter and our joy are signs of weakness. But they’re wrong because that is our strength.” There have been plans to challenge the new law in court by The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), as well as LGBTQ+ civil rights organization Lambda Legal.

In a combined statement, ACLU and Lambda Legal responded, “We are dedicated to overturning this unconstitutional law and are confident the state will find itself completely incapable of defending it in court. We want transgender youth to know they are not alone and this fight is not over.”

Tennessee is now one of seven states that have enacted such laws to target a specific group, including Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, South Dakota, Utah, and Mississippi. In addition, state legislators across the nation have already introduced 300 bills that target the LGBTQ community.