

**Our democracy is at risk!
If we are complacent it will FALL**

Mental wellness: we all need help sometimes

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of stories and
resources - pg 3



**Out in Music:
Dar Williams talks
about new release**
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Mission:

The focus of *Qnotes* is to serve the LGBTQ and straight ally communities of the Charlotte region, North Carolina and beyond, by featuring arts, entertainment, news and views content in print and online that directly enlightens, informs and engages the readers about LGBTQ life and social justice issues.

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Carolina Conference on Queer Youth returns to the Queen City

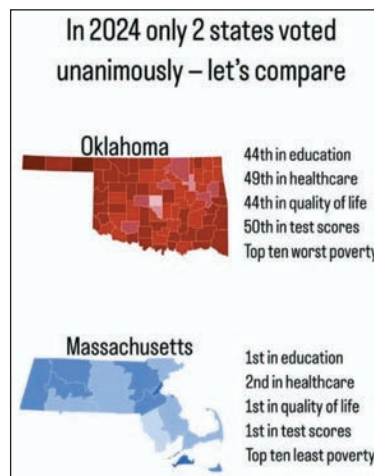
CCQY returns to Charlotte on Friday, Oct. 17 offering a full day of training and collaboration for adults who work with LGBTQ+ young people. The annual conference focuses on advancing the well-being and rights of community youth in schools and safe spaces by bringing together educators, administrators, social workers and other youth-serving professionals to build networks of support.

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Jimmy Kimmel's suspension should anger every American

The move to suspend the ABC late night show has drawn criticism from both sides of the aisle



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

"Demolition, construction. This is not how an adult grieves the murder of someone he called a friend; this is how a four-year-old mourns a goldfish."

"we're not done yet" with the changes in "the media ecosystem" that are consequences of President Donald Trump's election last fall. "I do think that again, we are in the

you're not done yet?" CNBC anchor David Faber asked Carr in an interview following Kimmel's suspension. "Then, I mean, will you only be pleased when none of these comedians have a show on broadcast television?"

Carr replied, "No, it's not any particular show or any particular person. It's just we're in the midst of a very disruptive moment right now, and I just, frankly, expect that we're going to continue to see changes in the media ecosystem."

Carr's words and Kimmel's suspension have elicited criticisms from across all sides of the political spectrum, stating these actions go against the First Amendment. One of the more surprising critics of Carr's anti-free speech rhetoric is staunch conservative U.S. Senator Ted Cruz, calling the Trump administration's response to Kimmel's Kirk comments "dangerous as hell."

"I think it is unbelievably dangerous for government to put itself in the position of saying we're going to decide what speech we like and what we don't, and we're going to threaten to take you off air if we don't like what you're saying," Cruz said on his podcast. "I like Brendan Carr. He's a good guy, he's the chairman of the FCC. I work closely with him, but what he said there is dangerous as hell ... It might feel good right now to threaten Jimmy Kimmel, yeah, but when it is used to silence every conservative in America, we will regret it."

While Kimmel's approach may seem insensitive or even "disgusting" to some folks, the truth of the matter is that Kimmel is protected under the First Amendment to state his thoughts on current events. Most importantly, he is protected by a multitude of Supreme Court precedents reaffirming Kimmel's right to criticize his government on whatever he sees fit.

Carr, Trump and others need a refresh on Constitutional Law. Might I suggest looking at *New York Times Co. v. United States* from 1971, where the Supreme Court rejected the Nixon administration's attempt to prevent the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* from publishing the Pentagon Papers. What about *Rosenberger v. Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia* in 1995, when The Court held while the government can create forums for speech, it cannot engage in viewpoint discrimination by excluding speech based on the message or ideas being expressed? Maybe they should look at *National Rifle Association of America v. Vullo* from just last year where, in a unanimous decision, the Court affirmed that government officials cannot use their power to threaten or coerce private companies into punishing or suppressing speech with which the government disagrees.

What is happening to Kimmel is something our Founding Fathers warned us about over and over and over — the threat is real, and it is here. The government is coming for your right to speak against it, and it's our duty to fight everyday to ensure we don't lose the foundational values that make the United States the land of the free. ::

The First Amendment states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Late night talk shows have served as a public square for accessible political discussions since the inception of television. From Faye Emerson's late night talk show in the 1940s and 1950s to today's Jimmy Fallon and Stephen Colbert, the late night circuit continues to be a place where folks across the country can tune in to hear comedic and sometimes cathartic jabs at politicians who often lose sight of the issues facing the average American.

These late night talk shows — such as Saturday Night Live, The Daily Show, Last Week Tonight and Real Time — and their hosts utilize their First Amendment right of Freedom of Speech to spread ideas and opinions, a concept universally accepted and touted as what makes the United States the best country in the world.

Now, the current federal administration is set to undermine the most important laws in our nation by threatening to take away licenses from media companies whose programs criticize the government. The latest case: the suspension of Jimmy Kimmel Live! over a joke made by the show's namesake regarding the suspected assassin of conservative commentator Charlie Kirk.

Now, what could this beloved TV host say to get him kicked off the air practically overnight?

Kimmel, who has been the host of the ABC late night show since 2003, spoke on Kirk's killing during his Sept. 15 monologue. He specifically focused on the mystery behind the shooter's motives and where they fell on the political spectrum, citing some speculation online the shooter may have been a part of far-right forums or groups who felt Kirk and other mainstream conservatives aren't extreme enough.

"We hit some new lows over the weekend with the MAGA gang desperately trying to characterize this kid who murdered Charlie Kirk as anything other than one of them, and doing everything they can to score political points from it," Kimmel said.

Kimmel then went on to criticize President Donald Trump, specifically for his seemingly performative grief over Kirk's death. He used a clip of a reporter asking Trump how he was coping with Kirk's passing. The president responded he was "very good" and then quickly pivoted to talk about the over \$200 million ballroom being built at the White House.

"Yes, he's at the fourth stage of grief: construction," Kimmel quipped.



The voice of truth: Jimmy Kimmel.
CREDIT: Facebook

Conservatives on social media were quick to point the finger at Kimmel, claiming he mischaracterized the political ideologies held by the accused shooter, as many Republican officials involved in the investigation have claimed "leftist ideology" to be the shooter's codex. Influential conservative personalities denounced Kimmel's jabs at the administration's approach to the case, some going as far as to call Kimmel's words "disgusting" and "truly sick."

That's when the show was suspended "indefinitely" by Disney, which is ABC's parent company.

One of the major contributors to the ongoing pressure to oust Kimmel appears to be Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Brendan Carr. Since Kimmel's show was suspended, Carr has continued to put out thinly veiled threats to other media outlets who dare to conflict with the current administration.

Carr said in an interview on CNBC that

midst of a massive shift in dynamics in the media ecosystem for lots of reasons, again, including the permission structure that President Trump's election has provided," the FCC chief said. "And I would simply say we're not done yet with seeing the consequences of that."

This is the same man who, at the beginning of his tenure as FCC chair, stated political satire was "one of the oldest and most important forms of free speech," and if there was any form of subtle or informal pressure campaigns — letters, hearings or backchannel threats — it was the equivalent of the government trying to squash views it didn't like.

Now, Carr is threatening ABC and Disney to deal with Kimmel "The easy or the hard way," a complete 180 degree flip from his previous public stance. When asked about Trump's comments on wanting to remove other comedians' programs, Carr seemingly danced around the question.

"What does that mean when you say



Specified LGBTQ+ mental health resources removed from national crisis line

Changes in American democracy impacting our community



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

Despite President Donald Trump and his fellow Republicans claiming to be the “pro-life” party, it’s becoming abundantly clear the only lives Republicans are inclined to protect are their own. As if the numerous executive orders targeting transgender and queer-identifying folks weren’t enough, the Trump administration has taken its attacks on LGBTQ+ Americans to the next level.

On July 17, it was announced the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline would no longer provide a specialized hotline for LGBTQ+ youth, leaving millions of children to fend for themselves in a world built, oftentimes, against them. This decision is part of a recent U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announcement where federal funding for the service was eliminated.

While the national hotline was signed into law by Trump in 2020, it wasn’t until President Joe Biden’s administration that the 988 hotline became available to the American Public. The LGBTQ+ youth specialized services hotline was established during Biden’s administration with the help and partnership of the Trevor Project, a known LGBTQ+ advocacy organization aiming to improve the mental health of queer and gender-nonconforming folks across the country.

According to the latest data from the US Department of Health and Human Services’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), more than 14.5 million people have called, texted or sent chats to the 988 Lifeline and have been transferred to a crisis contact center since the hotline’s inception in 2022. Nearly 1.3 million of those were routed to the LGBTQ+ specialized service.

“On July 17, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline will no longer silo LGB+ youth services, also known as the ‘Press 3 option,’ to focus on serving all help seekers, including those previously served through the Press 3 option,” SAMHSA’s statement said Tuesday.

“The Press 3 option was established as a pilot program in Fiscal Year 2022 under a government agreement with a third party. The Fiscal Year 2023 Omnibus included a Congressional directive for \$29.7 million

to fund the specialized services. Federal funding in FY24 for the Press 3 services increased to \$33 million,” the statement said. “As of June 2025, more than \$33 million in funds have been spent to support the subnetworks, fully expending the monies allocated for 988 Lifeline LGB[TQ]+ subnetwork services.”

The Trevor Project conducts a survey every year to collect data regarding the mental health status of LGBTQ+ youth across the United States, and the 2024 data paints a grim picture:



It’s clear LGBTQ+ youth are statistically more likely to struggle with their mental health. While the Republican party continues to claim they are working to protect the vulnerable children and youth in the United States, their leaders are the ones who continuously slash resources for the most vulnerable among us.

In North Carolina

NC Health News reported from 2022 through this year, the state averaged more than 9,400 calls, texts or chats each month via its 988 hotline centers. In the past year alone, there were about 11,443 contacts per month, according to the DHHS data dashboard. Sarah Mikhail, CEO of Time Out Youth, told NC Health News her organization “felt really scared” when they learned the specialized line for LGBTQ+ youth mental health services was being discontinued.

“While [LGBTQ+ youth] can still call 988, they won’t get a specialized person who understands the unique needs of a young, queer or trans person that’s in need of support when they’re contemplating whether they want to live or not,” Mikhail said. “And

so that’s what’s really scary to us, is not caring about the need for specialized understanding of the lived experience of queer and trans young people.”

WRAL reported the day the national hotline discontinued its LGBTQ+ youth services, the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) was working to train its employees to fill in the gaps from the removal of the federal LGBTQ+ youth line. NCDHHS Director of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Use Services Kelly Crosbie told WXII while the hotline for specialized service for LGBTQ+ youth has been discontinued, that doesn’t mean the LGBTQ+ community can’t reach out to the NCDHHS line for support. “Despite the end of federal funding, we are here,” said Crosbie.

Crosbie also stated the agency is working to provide funding to community organizations that support queer people and connect with local counselors. In a separate interview with NC Health News, Crosbie shared she does worry how this decision could impact queer or gender-nonconform-

ing people seeking support or help now that these services have been discontinued.

“988 is here, that will not change. They’re very important, and they matter. We don’t feel good that it was eliminated,” Crosbie added. “We want people to know we’re prepared and that they matter.”

While the national specialized hotline is no longer in service, the Trevor Project has its own specialized line for LGBTQ+ youth



mental health support. Here are some ways to get in touch with The Trevor Project, 24/7:

Text START to 678-678. You’ll be connected to a trained counselor and be able to message them privately.

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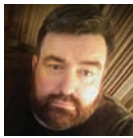
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Who was Rogerick Currie, and why is he dead?

Thirty-five-year old appeared to be a much-loved individual in the Charlotte community



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

Early in the morning of Sunday, Sept. 7, shortly after 1:15 a.m., Rogerick Currie was reportedly walking on a stretch of the 4000 block of Queen City Drive (adjacent to a popular gay nightclub in Charlotte known as The Woodshed) when he was shot by another person on the scene.

According to the police report he was killed at the aforementioned address, although that same report indicates he was transported to Atrium Health main where he was pronounced dead from gunshot wounds shortly after 2:00 a.m.

Other points of interest stand out on the police report. In a section that describes the relationship between the victim and the suspect, reporting officer SV Flannery indicated the shooter was unknown to the victim. However, Flannery also recorded that the victim was shot – with a handgun – and killed by a “known suspect.” The offense committed, as listed on the document obtained by Qnotes, is described as Homicide/Murder: First or Second Degree.

It is not clear who the suspect is known by, although an individual identified as Sherman Lamar Johnson is listed as the Primary Reporting Person.

In a conversation with Qnotes the detective assigned to the case, identified as Officer JA Carter, explained that the suspect is known, however no charges have been filed and there are no plans for an arrest despite the homicide description listed on the report. Carter also confirmed that Currie’s family had been informed of the details. She declined to identify the shooter, the specifics surrounding their reason for shooting Currie and what transpired before his death. When pushed for a further explanation she offered: “There are many reasons a person might shoot another, such as self-defense.”

Given that CMPD released a public statement indicating the case investigation was ongoing, Carter’s statement that no further actions were expected seems to contradict the initial police report and the press release.

“The investigation into this case is active and ongoing,” the statement reads. “As additional information develops, it will be released by the CMPD’s Public Affairs Division. Anyone with information about this incident is asked to call 704-432-8477



In better days: Rogerick Llevon Currie.
CREDIT: Facebook

(TIPS) and speak directly to a Homicide Unit detective. Detective Carter is the lead detective assigned to this case.”

Initially, Carter seemed unfamiliar with the police department’s statement, but then offered the assessment that it was “just standard procedure.”

Commentary from multiple sources via social media claimed Currie had previously been inside the Woodshed prior to the shooting, although Carter would not confirm that information. “It’s not relevant,” she said. “It’s not relevant to the case.”

While friends and family have posted comments about Currie throughout multiple social media platforms, none discovered during in-depth internet research have questioned the reason behind his death, suggested the police were somehow performing inadequately or demanded additional efforts from CMPD regarding the case.

Public records identify Currie as a long-time Charlotte resident, and a North Carolina native of Fayetteville. He attended Claflin University, an Historic Black University in Orangeburg, S.C., where he

was a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and later attended Johnson C. Smith to obtain a master’s degree.

His Facebook page indicates he had previously worked for a non-profit known as Teach For America and Lowe’s Hardware, where he had participated in extensive DEI training prior to the company discontinuing the programs. His LinkedIn profile shows that he also spent just over a year working at the Men’s Shelter of Charlotte (now known as Roof Above).

Public search services indicate he had at one time shared a residence with another Charlotte man known as Jamil Brown. Brown posted several pho-

tos and sentiments on social media about the time the two men spent together.

“Rogerick,” he wrote. “A love like yours is immeasurable to calculate. You loved so hard and beautifully. Your light brighten[ed] my world 10X over. At times I was so undeserving of your love and light, but you loved me anyway. God, your smile! Your smile is priceless and it just made me feel so special. From day 1 our connection was instant and incredibly strong, we talked about how no one understood it. I remember [the] day I told you that you felt like home and how much that made you happy. We laughed, danced [and] cried together. You taught me so much, believed in me so much. There will never be another you. I thank God for you. I am so grateful we got to tell each other how much we cared and loved each other over this past year. I don’t know how to live life without you. I am forever yours. I love you to the moon and back. Until we meet again my love.”

But Brown wasn’t the only one who posted words of praise for Currie. From his sister Melissa Currie came the following words: “I am so lost [for] words. I did not only lose a brother, I lost my best friend, my ear, my voice, my motivation, my inspiration, my guidance, my twin. You gave me so much love, knowledge, and acknowledgment. You made me feel so seen. You made me feel like I mattered, most of all you made me feel loved. All I can hear you say is “keep pushing” I’m trying. For you I will always keep trying. I thank you for all the years you protected and loved your little sister.”

Many other stories have been shared on social media about Currie, all full of caring and compassion for the man who touched their lives so deeply.

The question remains, why is he dead? Why did someone purportedly feel the need to shoot him in order to protect themselves, and why is CMPD not sharing the information they said they would in the initial press release? :

A funeral service was held for Rogerick Llevon Currie Sept. 20 at the Evangelical House of God at 116 South Mitchell Street in Spring Lake, N.C. Viewing and visitation began at 10 a.m. and continued until noon. A memorial service followed immediately after.



Rogerick Currie with Jamil Brown.
CREDIT: Facebook



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National HRC dinner honors southern artist Amy Sherald

The acclaimed artist was recognized for advocacy and artwork amplifying LGBTQ+ visibility



by Liz Schob
Qnotes Staff Writer

The Human Rights Campaign celebrated its annual National Dinner on Saturday, Sept. 13 in Washington, D.C., drawing a sold-out crowd of more than 2,000 members and supporters. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Ally for Equality Award to acclaimed artist Amy Sherald.

Sherald, known for her vivid portraiture and outspoken advocacy, was recognized for centering LGBTQ+ lives in her art. Her painting "Trans Forming Liberty" reimagines Black transgender artist Arewà Basit as the Statue of Liberty, a piece HRC praised as both a demand for visibility and a call to expand the American dream.

In remarks at the dinner, HRC President Kelley Robinson said Sherald's work embodies the strength and diversity of the LGBTQ+ community. Robinson described her as an artist whose vision confronts censorship and bigotry while affirming inclusion. "This night will be a moment to lift up the voices of our advocates, celebrate the beauty of our authentic selves, and unite around a future where our community's dreams know no limits," Robinson said.

Sherald spoke about art's role in shaping social change. She said her work aims to present the full truth of American life, insisting that transgender, Black and Brown people are essential to that story. "Attempts to erase our existence is not only futile, but a blatant disservice to the truth," she told



From left: Maryland Governor Wes Moore, HRC President Kelley Robinson, and artist Amy Sherald at the Human Rights Campaign's 2025 National Dinner in Washington, D.C. CREDIT: Instagram

the audience. Sherald added that, as LGBTQ+ people face attacks on rights and representation, she hopes her portraits remind the country that queer and trans communities are woven into the nation's fabric.

Born in Columbus, Ga., Sherald has long used portraiture to highlight underrepresented communities. She became the first woman and the first Black artist to win the National Portrait Gallery's Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition in 2016. The following year, she was commissioned to paint former First Lady Michelle Obama, becoming one of the first Black artists to receive a presidential commission from the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery. In 2020, her portrait of Breonna Taylor appeared on the cover of Vanity Fair, fur-

ther cementing her reputation as an artist willing to confront social and political realities through her work.

Sherald also drew headlines this year when she withdrew her planned exhibition American Sublime from the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. Museum officials had considered excluding "Trans Forming Liberty" in response to anti-LGBTQ+ censorship attempts by the Trump administration. Sherald chose to pull the entire show rather than allow the painting to be silenced, underscoring her commitment to defending transgender representation.

The National Dinner, held at the Washington Hilton, remains one of HRC's signature events. Each year it raises funds to support the organization's work advancing LGBTQ+ equality across the country, while also serving as a rallying point for members and advocates. ::

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What we know about activist Charlie Kirk's suspected killer

Authorities are piecing together evidence against Tyler Robinson, the 22-year-old Utah man arrested last week in connection with the fatal shooting of conservative activist Charlie Kirk at Utah Valley University.

FBI Director Kash Patel confirmed that Robinson's DNA was found on a towel wrapped around a rifle recovered near the scene. Patel said investigators recovered the contents of a note Robinson attempted to destroy, on which the suspect wrote he had an opportunity to "take out" Kirk and planned to do so. Authorities have stated that Robinson has not been cooperating with law enforcement.

Robinson is being held without bail at the Utah County Jail on charges of aggravated murder, felony discharge of a firearm, and obstruction of justice. Authorities have said they intend to pursue capital murder charges. He has not cooperated with investigators and is on special watch pending a mental health evaluation.

Ammunition recovered with the rifle has become a central focus of the

case. Shell casings bore engravings that included the phrase "Hey fascist! Catch! ↑ → ↓ ↓ ↓," a sequence of arrows with reported ties to the video game Helldivers 2. Other casings reportedly contained lyrics from the antifascist anthem "Bella ciao" and the mocking line "If you read this, you are GAY Lmao." Experts caution that such messages may have been chosen for their ambiguity, reflecting a pattern in which shooters employ memes or satire that resist straightforward interpretation.

Robinson's background has also come under scrutiny. He was enrolled in an electrical apprenticeship program in St. George and is registered as an unaffiliated voter. Records show he did not vote in recent elections, and officials say he has no prior criminal record. Family members told investigators that Robinson had become "more political" in recent years and expressed dislike for Kirk's views. His parents are registered Republicans, and relatives said political discussions within the family often included criticism of Kirk. Robinson's

roommate, who is reportedly his romantic partner and is transgender, has been co-operating with investigators and reportedly had no knowledge of the shooting.

Speculation has circulated over possible links between Robinson and the far-right Groyper, a movement led by Nick Fuentes that often targeted Kirk as too moderate.

Symbols on the recovered casings suggested to some analysts a connection to Groyper imagery. However, investigators have not confirmed any direct ties between Robinson and the group. Fuentes has publicly denied involvement, saying his followers are being "framed" and disavowing violence.

Utah Governor Spencer Cox has said people close to Robinson described him as influenced by leftist ideology, though this has not been independently confirmed. Cox also noted Robinson's increasing engagement with online communities and "dark corners of the internet," which are

now under review by investigators.

The investigation remains active, and officials have said more evidence will become public when formal charges are filed. For now, Robinson's motives remain unclear, with authorities continuing to sort confirmed facts from speculation. ::

— Liz Schob



Tyler Robinson is being held without bail at the Utah County Jail in connection to the shooting of conservative activist Charlie Kirk. CREDIT: Facebook

SCOTUS immigration ruling puts LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in danger

The U.S. Supreme Court issued a 6-3 decision on Sept. 8, lifting a lower court order that had restricted immigration agents (such as ICE) from conducting "roving" immigration patrols in Los Angeles.

That decision could potentially place LGBTQ+ asylum seekers at unprecedented risk of discrimination, violence and deportation to countries where they face persecution or death. The Court's ruling allows federal agents to resume the patrols and conduct immigration stops based on factors including appearance, language, occupation and location – tactics that a federal judge had previously found violated the Constitution based on "a mountain of evidence" of discriminatory enforcement.

"Today's Supreme Court decision is a devastating blow to LGBTQ asylum seekers

who have already endured unimaginable persecution and violence," said Imani Rupert-Gordon, President of the National Center for LGBTQ Rights (NCLR). "By green-lighting discriminatory profiling tactics, the Court has essentially given immigration agents a license to target the most vulnerable members of our community."

Many LGBTQ+ asylum seekers flee countries where being LGBTQ+ is criminalized and sometimes punishable by death. Deportation can be a death sentence.

The National Center for LGBTQ Rights is calling on the broader LGBTQ+ community and allies to take immediate action to stop this egregious abuse, including demanding immigration reform that protects LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and supporting organizations providing legal aid and services to



In dissent: 'We should not have to live in a country where the Government can seize anyone who looks Latino, speaks Spanish and appears to work a low wage job.' – Justice Sonia Sotomayor CREDIT: Creative Commons License

"We cannot stand silent while our most vulnerable community members are hunted down and sent back to face torture or death. This is a moment that demands our collective action and solidarity."

More than half of LGBTQ asylum seekers come from Central America's Northern Triangle, where they face violence, discrimination and persecution. A 2021 study found that 1.3 million adult immigrants in the U.S. identify as LGBTQ, including 289,700 who are undocumented. The Supreme Court's decision lifts a temporary restraining order that prohibited federal agents from conducting immigration stops based solely on race, ethnicity, language, occupation or location. Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote in dissent: "We should

not have to live in a country where the Government can seize anyone who looks Latino, speaks Spanish and appears to work a low wage job." ::

— Qnotes Staff

LGBTQ+ immigrants.

"The LGBTQ community knows what it means to face persecution and discrimination," said Noemi Calonje, the Director of NCLR's Immigration & Asylum Program.

Where can I get a COVID shot?

New restrictions on who can get COVID-19 vaccines have made them difficult to find in North Carolina, with some pharmacies pausing administration altogether after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration revoked emergency authorization the first week of September.

The agency's decision limited shots to people 65 and older and to younger adults with at least one underlying health condition, according to the Associated Press.

Children's access was also restricted: Pfizer's vaccine is no longer authorized for those under five, while Moderna's Spikevax remains available only to children under five with serious health issues.

Still, some providers continue to offer vaccines under the new rules, raising the question of where residents can turn for a shot. Here's where you can get a COVID-19 vaccine in North Carolina.

CVS MinuteClinic

While most places offering COVID-19 vaccines require a prescription to obtain them, you can get a shot at any MinuteClinic in the state without a note from a doctor, a spokesperson for the company told the



The FDA has approved new updated COVID-19 vaccines, but access will be limited to those over 65 and younger individuals considered at higher risk of severe illness.

Observer in an email. You'll need a valid photo ID and insurance card (or other form of payment) to receive care, according to CVS. However, your insurance may not cover the vaccine until the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's vaccine advisory panel votes to update COVID-19 guidelines later this month, the *Charlotte Observer* previously reported.

Until then, North Carolina patients could pay \$224.99 for a COVID vaccine at CVS.

Here's where MinuteClinics are in the Charlotte and Triangle areas:

- 4100 Carmel Rd., Charlotte
- 10515 Mallard Creek Rd., Charlotte
- 9915 Park Cedar Dr., Charlotte
- 9805 Rocky River Rd., Charlotte
- 13845 Conlan Cir., Charlotte
- 14125 Steele Creek Rd., Charlotte
- 9628 Rea Rd., Charlotte

Charlotte Metro

- 1305 Matthews Township Pkwy., Matthews
- 3310 Siskey Pkwy., Matthews
- 6750 Wilkinson Blvd., Belmont

Triangle

- 4191 The Circle at North Hills St., Raleigh
- 2411 Landmark Dr., Raleigh
- 2340 Spring Forest Rd., Raleigh
- 790 Timber Dr., Garner
- 6840 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh
- 2994 Kildaire Farm Rd., Cary
- 13304 Leesville Church Rd., Raleigh
- 11911 Clayton Blvd., Clayton
- 1201 Beaver Creek Commons Dr., Apex
- 12000 Retail Dr., Wake Forest
- 245 E. Roosevelt Ave., Wake Forest
- 605 N. Main St., Fuquay-Varina
- 3573 Hillsborough Rd., Durham
- 5311 Roxboro Rd., Durham
- 11314 U.S. 15 501 N., Chapel Hill ::

This article appears courtesy of our media partner *The Charlotte Observer* — Evan Moore / *Charlotte Observer*

Carolina Conference on Queer Youth returns to the Queen City in October



Time Out Youth in Charlotte, one of the presenting organizations behind the Carolina Conference on Queer Youth. CREDIT: Facebook

The Carolina Conference on Queer Youth (CCQY) returns to Charlotte on Friday, Oct. 17 offering a full day of training, net-

working, and collaboration for adults who work with LGBTQ+ young people.

The annual conference is dedicated to advancing the well-being and rights of LGBTQ+ youth in schools and community spaces across the region. It brings together educators, administrators, counselors, social workers and other youth-serving professionals to share strategies, learn new tools and build stronger networks of support.

This year's CCQY is presented by Time Out Youth, Carolina's CARE Partnership, Charlotte Trans Health, Gender Education Network, PFLAG Charlotte and Welcoming Schools. Sponsors include Bank of America and Innovation Unbiased. The exact location and parking details will be provided to registered attendees. Tickets are available now, and each attendee must register individually.

The day's schedule is designed to bal-

ance structured learning with time to connect. Registration opens at 8 a.m., followed by a welcome message. Attendees will take part in four workshop blocks across the day with short breaks between sessions, lunch and networking at midday and a youth panel with closing remarks from 3 to 4 p.m.

Organizers have released a preview of session titles, which cover a wide range of needs. Practical workshops include "The ABCs and 123s of LGBTQIA+," "Strategies to Plan Coming Out/Disclosure... or Not" and "Inclusion: The Impact of Policy Shifts on LGBTQ Students." Educators can also look forward to "Creating a Welcoming School: Professional Development for School Educators." Healing-centered and creative offerings include "The Power of a Story: Poetry as Medicine," "Humor as Healing: How to Laugh Through the Chaos" and "Collaging Change: Reconnecting to Our Transformative Selves to Better Serve LGBTQ Youth." Other sessions highlight the experiences of queer youth of color, the role of families and the impact of social media. Breakfast and lunch are included with

registration, with options for vegans, vegetarians and other dietary needs. Attendees are encouraged to share restrictions when they register. Accessibility is also a priority with organizers noting that the venue is fully ADA accessible and has wheelchair access throughout. Interpreters will be provided as needed and participants may submit requests for accommodations in advance.

Each attendee will receive a Certificate of Attendance documenting their hours at the conference, which can be used to apply for continuing education credit through their district or institution. Scholarships are available to help offset costs for those with financial barriers. Interested attendees are asked to reach out directly to the planning committee for more details.

While proposals for this year's conference have already closed, organizers say the schedule promises a rich slate of sessions designed to educate, inspire and equip attendees. More information, including registration and parking details, can be found by visiting <https://timeoutyouth.org/ccqy/>. ::

— Liz Schob

The Carolina Renaissance Festival returns to Huntersville

The Carolina Renaissance Festival will return to Huntersville this fall for its 32nd season of medieval-themed entertainment. The festival will run for eight weekends, opening Saturday, Oct. 4, and continuing through Sunday, Nov. 23.

The festival transforms a 25-acre "storybook village" north of Charlotte into a recreation of a 16th-century European marketplace. Visitors will see cottages, castles, pubs and stages filled with theater, music and games. More than 300 costumed characters, including knights, peasants, fairies and royalty will roam the grounds and interact with guests, making every visit feel like stepping into another era.

Among the attractions are the Tournament Joust, where armored knights clash in displays of speed and chivalry, and Bird of Prey demonstrations featuring

falcons, hawks and owls in flight. The Living Mermaids will also return, performing underwater shows for children. New musicians, circus acts and artisans will join returning favorites to create a full schedule of entertainment throughout the day.

The artisan marketplace will feature more than 140 merchants sell-

ing handmade jewelry, blown glass, woven garments, musical instruments and more. Craftspeople will demonstrate traditional techniques, and visitors can even try blacksmithing at the Dragon Forge.

Adventures for all ages include people-powered rides and games of skill such as castle wall climbing, Da Vinci's flying

machine and tomato throwing at comedic performers. Adults will also have the chance to take part in activities such as archery and ax throwing. Guests are encouraged to come in costume and rentals will be available at the Belrose

Costume Shop, allowing everyone to join in the spirit of the festival.

Food is another centerpiece of the festival. Attendees can enjoy turkey legs, steak-on-a-stake, bread bowl stews, and sweet treats from the bakery and chocolate shoppe. Drinks will include craft ale, honey mead, medieval margaritas and Pepsi. Gluten-free and vegetarian options will also be available.

The festival will be held rain or shine every Saturday and Sunday from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Parking will be free, courtesy of Harris Teeter. Tickets are available online while supplies last. Prices are \$36 for adults and \$22 for children ages five to 12. Children four and under will be admitted free.

Located off Highway 73 at Poplar Tent Road between I-77 and I-85, the Carolina Renaissance Festival remains one of the region's most beloved fall traditions. Organizers describe it as a destination for quality entertainment that offers visitors a chance to leave the modern world behind and spend a day immersed in history, imagination and play. ::

— Liz Schob



The Carolina Renaissance Festival celebrates its 32nd season. CREDIT: Facebook

S.C. Lawmakers to consider total abortion ban on Oct. 1

South Carolina lawmakers will take up one of the most restrictive abortion proposals in the country when a Senate subcommittee convenes Oct. 1 to hear Senate Bill 323. Opponents describe the legislation as an extreme and unconstitutional attack on personal rights.

The bill, also known as the "Unborn Child Protection Act," would replace the state's current six-week abortion ban with a total ban carrying severe penalties. Among its provisions, the bill would equate abortion with homicide, exposing patients and providers to sentences of up to 30 years in prison. It would also make it a felony to provide information about obtaining an abortion through a phone call or a website.

Senate Bill 323 goes far beyond banning abortion. It eliminates exceptions for rape, incest, fatal fetal anomaly and deletes the

"fetal heartbeat" framework from the existing law. It prohibits transporting a minor out of state to obtain an abortion, criminalizes possession of abortion medication, and requires public school students to watch "Meet Baby Olivia," an anti-abortion video produced by Live Action. The bill also redefines legal contraception to exclude methods that prevent ovulation or implantation, raising concerns about restrictions on birth control and IVF.

"Senate Bill 323 is unconstitutional and deadly," explained Courtney Thomas, the advocacy director for the ACLU of South Carolina. "This bill would criminalize medical care, invade our privacy, and place unconstitutional restrictions on speech, travel, and association. Any lawmaker who cares about the health and safety of South Carolinians should be fighting tooth and nail to stop this bill."

Healthcare advocates warn that the pro-

posal would criminalize doctors and threaten access to contraception and fertility treatments. "This bill is dangerous beyond anything we've seen before," said Amalia Luxardo, CEO of the Women's Rights and Empowerment Network. "It doesn't just ban abortion. It criminalizes doctors, censors information and even opens the door for lawsuits against anyone who helps a pregnant person."

For those who have already been harmed by South Carolina's existing ban, the new proposal compounds fear and uncertainty. Charleston mother Tori Nardone told ABC News 4 she was forced to leave the state after her fetus was diagnosed with a fatal anomaly during her second trimester. "It breaks my heart for other aspiring moms and other moms who want to grow their families, who are simply just terrified to do so in this state," she said.

Advocates also note that the bill could worsen the state's shortage of obstetricians. "We are going to see probably more medical professionals leave the state who specialize in the care of pregnant women," said Matthew Butler, advocacy strategist

with the ACLU of South Carolina.

The hearing is scheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 1, at 9:30 a.m. in Room 105 of the Gressette Building at the Columbia State House. Public testimony sign-ups have not yet opened, but written comments can be submitted to the Senate Medical Affairs Subcommittee. ::

— Liz Schob



The South Carolina State House in Columbia, where lawmakers will hold a hearing on Senate Bill 323, a proposed total abortion ban, on Oct. 1. CREDIT: Instagram

The impact of politics and culture on the LGBTQ+ psyche

How we got here, how it's impacting us and what we can do



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

Have you ever woken up and felt like you didn't recognize where you were? If you've been around long enough and paid attention, chances are you'll remember what life was like in this country under any presidential administrations that didn't include the name Trump, and you've had that experience.

Most would agree that life lived during the first Trump administration was annoying. Trump was mentally scattered and reportedly spent most of his time in the White House alone with cheeseburgers, screaming at cable news and posting vengeful rants on what was then known as Twitter.

At that time, if he even had an agenda, it was a tangled mess of confusion.

As the years passed he came to realize leaning heavily on the ideology of the far right and evangelical crowd won him more attention, supporters and votes. He unabashedly played into their passions: blind and literal interpretation of Christian "faith," silencing those unlike themselves and the ecstasy of acting like a bully while crying victim.

But what did Trump accomplish?

He created an army of followers that called themselves MAGA. They marched on the capital and were willing to sacrifice themselves and others to meet his demands, which they embraced like religious faith. His most obvious accomplishment came in the form of tipping the balance of power in the Supreme Court, which led to the overturning of a woman's right to reproductive freedom.

The four-year reprieve we received during the Biden/Harris administration was pleasant enough, but constantly overshadowed by cable news media's inability to turn away from MAGA cries of injustice and threats of retaliation come the next election cycle.

In the time leading up to the next election, Trump aligned himself with the world's richest individual and a far right-wing movement unlike anything ever experienced before. They even gave him a handbook for everything that needed to be accomplished in his next presidency: Project 2025 (P2025). While he initially denied any knowledge of P2025, he is clearly using it as a guidebook. Starting with the top of the Trump/MAGA attack list, let's take a look at actions against our community – from the youngest to the oldest – and how we're all being affected.

Transgender rights

Actions affecting transgender people from this administration include Executive Order 14168 ("Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government"), which mandates that federal agencies define sex as an unchangeable male and female identification based on biological characteristics that began "at conception."



The current state of affairs in the United States is negatively affecting our entire community.

As well, the State Department stopped processing gender marker changes and eliminated the "X" gender marker on U.S. passports; the Social Security Administration also stopped processing gender marker updates; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services updated forms to require applicants' "biological sex at birth" and Trump rescinded Biden-era policies that had allowed transgender people to serve openly in the military. As if that wasn't enough, Executive Order 14190, "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling," forces federal agencies to withhold funding from schools that implement policies supporting transgender students. In the federal prison system, directives were issued to place transgender inmates in federal prisons according to their sex assigned at birth, which includes placing transgender women in male facilities (and violates the federal level Prison Rape Elimination Act).

LGBTQ+ youth

Politics and culture in 2025 have increased mental distress and targeted protections for LGBTQ+ youth through policies and a continuing increase in anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment. Based on a survey conducted by The Trevor Project at the end of 2024, the impact is real, and severe. "From anti-LGBTQ+ politics to discrimination, bullying and barriers in mental health," said Ronita Nath, vice president of research at The Trevor Project, "these stressors pile up and take a real toll."

According to a 2025 Trevor Project survey, 90 Percent of LGBTQ+ youth reported that the current political climate had a negative impact on their well-being, with 53 percent stating it had a significant effect. Their 2024 survey also found that 39 percent of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered suicide in the previous year, with the number rising to 46 percent for transgender and non-binary youth.

Married and LGBTQ+ couples with children

LGBTQ+ and same-sex married couples with children face challenges that include

social and legal discrimination, difficulties with adoption and parental rights. Negative societal reactions, like children being bullied for having same-sex parents.

Parents receiving intrusive questions about their family structure are becoming increasingly more commonplace as politics and culture swing to the right, especially in rural areas and smaller towns throughout the country.

The challenges to LGBTQ+ rights all too often result in genuine fear for many of these families. While same-sex marriage is generally considered stable – by some – the far-right influence on federal protections, healthcare and social attitudes has created an overwhelmingly hostile environment. Organizations like the ACLU have warned that Trump's latest stint in the White House could remove existing federal nondiscrimination guarantees related to housing, healthcare, and Social Security for LGBTQ+ individuals and their families.

Despite the Respect for Marriage Act, which provides some federal protection for same-sex couples, the security of marriage equality is a concern for many families. Some MAGA-aligned political figures have openly expressed disapproval of same-sex marriage, and radical right-wing appointees on the Supreme Court, such as Justice Clarence Thomas, have indicated a willingness to reconsider the constitutional right to marry.

Seniors

The impact on LGBTQ+ seniors has included targeted rollbacks of non-discrimination protections, elimination of specific funding for LGBTQ+ programming, and rhetoric that results in fear and isolation. These actions are particularly damaging to a vulnerable population that is more likely to age without a partner or children and often depends on publicly funded social services.

Recent reconciliation laws passed under the Trump administration could eliminate or reduce Medicare coverage and SNAP benefits for millions of low-income older

adults, threatening the health and financial security of many LGBTQ+ seniors who depend on these programs.

The LGBTQ+ senior organization SAGE reported significant cuts to its federal grant funding due to executive orders restricting grants promoting "gender ideology." These funds support crucial programs for older adults who are twice as likely as their heterosexual peers to grow old without a significant other, and four times more likely to have no children.

LGBTQ+ seniors are also more predisposed to end up in nursing homes where they may fear discrimination and be forced to hide their identity. Organizations like SAGE, which provide sensitivity training to elder care workers, face funding cuts that could eliminate these critical programs. Removal of funding from organizations that support LGBTQ+ seniors can create a culture of fear that can lead to increased separation from community for older adults who rely on these services for community and support.

As of February 2025, the Trump administration has once again taken steps to repeal the "Equal Access Rule," which protects LGBTQ+ people from discrimination in HUD-funded housing and shelters. The potential re-enactment of these policies could worsen housing discrimination for LGBTQ+ older adults.

This combination of discriminatory concepts and policies and inflammatory rhetoric can create significant anxiety and stress for LGBTQ+ seniors, impacting their overall mental well-being.

What can we do?

The impact of Donald Trump and the MAGA movement's policies and rhetoric on the LGBTQ+ community impacts like a shower of bullets coming from multiple directions simultaneously. We're seeing a reduction in civil rights protections, a decrease in funding for essential support services, and the creation of a hostile environment that leads to fear and social detachment.

In lieu of this information, the question remaining is a simple one: what can we do?

The answer, however, is not simple, especially when you consider that Trump and his supporters in and outside of congress are seemingly dead set on achieving their goals. Multiple sources across the internet offer a multitude of advice for your own well-being: disconnect from the news, connect with trusted support, utilize crisis resources, find LGBTQ+ affirming therapists, stay informed on policy changes, secure legal documents, advocate for state and local protections, join local LGBTQ+ groups and register to vote.

The most important thing to do in a world like this: survive.

If it's within your means and something you feel the need to do (depending on your life circumstances), look into the possibility of relocation. Be it a move to a blue state or a different country, Or, staying put. You can lay low or fight for your rights where you are. You know your environment and what is the best path.

Do what is feasible and right for you. ::

Where to turn for mental health care when you need it most

List of resources includes free and low-cost resources



by Wendy Lyons
Qnotes Staff Writer

Stress is everywhere right now: jobs, money, safety, identity. For the queer community, the pressure is compounded. Medical services and protections are being reduced, coverage is being cut, and many are forced to carry crises alone. The gap between needing care and being able to access it is growing, and that gap can feel like isolation or worse.

Cuts to targeted programs hurt people who already carry extra burdens. LGBTQ+ individuals and especially trans and nonbinary people, face higher rates of harassment, stigma, isolation, and suicidal thoughts. Having a line to call that doesn't judge your identity, especially for those moments when you feel like you're running out of time, is a lifesaver.

There are local and national resources that honor dignity, respond without judgment and won't turn you away for lack of funds.

Local Charlotte Resources

Sante Mobile Crisis Team

704-566-3410

<http://thesantegroup.org/>

April Jones, a Crisis Specialist with Mobile Crisis, says her team operates every hour, every day, responding to crises across Mecklenburg County. Suicidal thoughts, HIV-related emergencies, moments where someone feels they have nowhere to turn, Mobile Crisis shows up at no cost to the person in crisis.

They don't provide transportation, but they work closely with law enforcement, paramedics, and community groups. If you have no insurance, or if navigating the system scares you, they help link you to other options. "We're out there at 2 a.m., 2 p.m., whenever the call comes," Jones explained. "It's not about insurance or paperwork. It's about keeping people safe and alive when they feel like no one else will listen."

Dudley's Place at Rosedale

704-977-2972

<https://www.dudleysplace.org/>

Broderick Roary, Director of Special Populations, shared that due to funding cuts, Dudley's Place has temporarily scaled back some therapy services. Full therapeutic programming is expected to resume in early 2026. Until then, Dudley's Place refers clients to community-based providers who can offer care now.

"Scaling back services is never what we want to do," Roary said. "But when the money isn't there, we have to find creative ways to make sure our clients are still connected to care. It's heartbreaking, because the need doesn't shrink just because the funding does."

Moss Counseling Services

704 493-8535

<https://www.moss counseling.com/>

Founded by **Beverly (Mecca) Moss**, this practice has been standing with the queer community since 2010, serving more than 870 families. Moss specializes in transgender and nonbinary care, depression, bipolar disorder, youth, and adults including those on Medicaid or without it. She also runs a nonprofit, A.S.P.I.R.E Inc., to help with basic needs like food or school supplies for patients and the community.

"People come to us carrying more than just mental health challenges," Moss said. "They're facing poverty, rejection, or unsafe homes. We don't just treat the symptoms. We walk with them, because healing takes more than one appointment."

Quality Comprehensive Health

704-394-8968

<https://www.qchealth.org/>

QC Health offers outreach, education, HIV prevention including preP, and links people with mental health services. They hold pop-ups and workshops, especially in underserved communities and for those pushed out by insurance gaps.

Ra'Shawn Flournoy, the CEO of Quality Comprehensive and a community health advocate with QC Health, underscored the

stakes: "When funding disappears, the first programs to go are the ones serving those already on the margins. We see it with HIV prevention, we see it with mental health. It's the trans community, young people of color, the uninsured, those who most need a lifeline and end up with nothing."

Other Resources and Hotlines

These resources and hotlines are answered by people who care, who understand, and who can help guide you to safety or the next step.

Atrium Health Behavioral Health

704 444-2400, <https://atriumhealth.org/locations/detail/atrium-health-behavioral-health>

Monarch

866 272-7826, <https://monarchnc.org/>

Trans Lifeline

For trans people who need peer support. U.S. number: 1-877-565-8860. Staffed by trans peers, offering understanding and confidentiality.

The Trevor Project

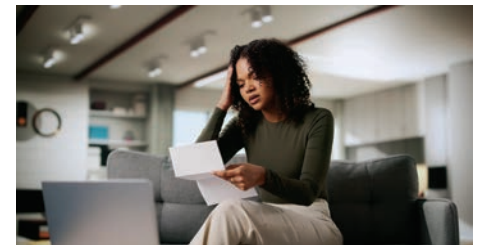
Youth under pressure, LGBTQ+ young people who feel there is no one to turn to, you can call them 24/7: 1-866-488-7386. They also do chat and text.

Crisis Text Line

Prefer texting? Text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the U.S. It's free, confidential, 24/7.

The Bigger Picture: Funding Cuts Matter

Nationally, the numbers paint an even starker picture. In the past two years, federal funding for LGBTQ+ medical and mental health programs has faced significant reductions, with some reports estimating cuts of 20 to 30 percent in grants that support community health centers and crisis response programs. Trans-focused initiatives have been hit hardest. Entire clinics in some states have shut down, and others are operating with skeleton staff, offering fewer therapy sessions, cutting back support groups, or



Financial cutbacks have left many individuals in our community without access to multiple healthcare needs.

ending specialized programs altogether.

The Human Rights Campaign reports that transgender people are four times more likely to experience mental health distress than the general population, yet they are also the group most affected by shrinking federal resources.

April Jones from Santé put it bluntly: "We've seen services end or scale back because the dollars just aren't there anymore. Without crisis response teams like ours, people would be left alone in their darkest hours. That's the reality of these cuts."

Broderick Roary echoed the urgency from Dudley's Place: "When programs close their doors, it's the most vulnerable, often Black and Brown trans people who pay the price. They already face the most barriers, and taking away resources just pushes them further to the margins. We're talking about lives on the line."

Why This Matters Now

These local groups and national hotlines are not optional extras. They are essential. They are the difference between someone isolating in silence or being seen, being heard, and getting care.

In moments of fear or despair, reach out. No one should feel alone. Your identity matters. Your life matters. If you or someone you know is in crisis, use these resources. Share them widely. Community is built one call, one conversation, one shared phone number at a time. ::

No guns for trans people

The DOJ cites gender dysphoria as a reason to ban gun possession



by L'Monique King
Qnotes Staff Writer

Newsflash! Keep reading for the latest anti-LGBTQ+ madness coming down the pike! In a time when our identities are routinely being weaponized against us once again the transgender community is being unjustly targeted with proposed legislation. This time, the bullet in the gun is Gender Dysphoria.



As of last month, the most recently used excuse for hate and/or phobic driven rhetoric is: A Minneapolis school shooting with a shooter – Robin Westman (who took the life of two children and injured approximately 17 others) was identified as a transgender woman. And Boom! Just like that – legislation is being proposed to strip the trans community of not having the right to own weapons – in addition to the new reinstatement of being disallowed in the military.

Are you still following? Allow us to make it plain – if you are trans, you must have Gender Dysphoria, a mental health disorder that does not make it safe for you to own, carry or operate a weapon.

But what actually is Gender Dysphoria?

According to Merriam Webster's Dictionary – gender dysphoria is a distressed state arising from conflict between a person's gender identity and the sex the person was identified as having at birth.

From a more clinical point of view The DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition) – the same reference book that once listed homosexuality under "sociopathic personality disturbance" [in its first edition in 1952; but removed it in 1973] currently lists the following criteria for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria:

A strong desire to be of the other gender or an insistence that one is the other gender.

A strong desire to have the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender.

A strong desire to be treated as the other gender.

A marked incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and their assigned gender, lasting for at least six months.

The distress or impairment must not be attributable to other mental disorders, such as body dysmorphic disorder or gender identity disorder (which was previously

used in the DSM-IV).

The DSM-5 does not specify a minimum age for diagnosis, but it has generally been considered appropriate for children who exhibit consistent and persistent gender-incongruent behavior. However, it's important to note that the DSM-5 is currently under revision. It is possible that the criteria for gender dysphoria may be changed, or the condition may be removed from the manual altogether.

Now, back to the weaponizing of the term with the recently (unofficially) proposed legislation we hinted at in the beginning of this article. Currently, the U.S. military has banned transgender people from enlisting or serving openly since President Donald Trump issued Executive Order 14183 on Jan. 27, 2025. This policy reversed a previous order by President Joe Biden that allowed open service. Regarding how those second amendment rights apply to our trans community, there's no legislation currently in place. However, and as you might imagine: The premise to pushing for such a law is to utilize existing laws that prohibit folks who are deemed mentally "defective" from owning guns. Simply stated, the idea is to argue that all transgender individuals

have gender dysphoria, a diagnosis that would qualify as a mental defect; making it unsafe for such individuals to own, possess and/or carry a gun.

Interestingly, a huge contingent of the conservative right is vehemently opposed to the idea of restricting trans citizens from owning and carrying firearms. In response to reports that officials in the Department of Justice were holding internal discussions about the matter, The National Rifle Association (NRA) has publicly stated its opposition to any blanket ban that would prevent transgender people from owning firearms. Earlier this month, the NRA issued a statement asserting that it will not support policies that "arbitrarily strip law-abiding citizens of their Second Amendment rights without due process."

That being said, reactions have been mixed, with LGBTQ+, allies and cisgender heterosexual community members either agreeing, disagreeing or having mixed feelings on how a gender dysphoria diagnosis might be used to further oppress and discriminate against trans community members and whether or not it's all necessary or ethical.

In an effort to gain greater perspective, Qnotes spoke with a few local trans community members and health care professionals about the issue.

Aly Jamison, a Black trans woman and professional dog groomer, talked about her experience with a gender dysphoria diagnosis. "I had it [gender dysphoria] at the beginning of my transition. However, as I blossomed, I grew to love the woman I am today unapologetically." She went on to comment on the proposed legislation, "It is complete poppycock!"

For Troy Aikens, a life coach and community advocate who also happens to be a trans man, gender dysphoria is something he admittedly lives daily. When thinking



'Not all transgender people experience gender dysphoria and being trans is not a mental illness.' – Dr. Holly Savoy, Executive Director of Charlotte Trans Health.
CREDIT: Facebook

about the recent push to use the diagnosis framed as a "defect" that should prevent the trans community from purchasing firearms, Aikens had thoughts to share.

"I'm not shocked, but appalled and dismayed by this recent mindset. Dysphoria has nothing to do with our ability to serve in the military or own a weapon."

Aikens continued: "This line of thinking has me questioning [the lack of push-back] regarding white males being allowed to own guns at all. This administration is paranoid, privileged and prejudiced towards anything non-cisgender, heterosexual and white male. In my opinion [they] are out of their political minds!"

Aikens has been living authentically for 21 years. He is fortunate to have an affirming community and a loving and supportive wife who keeps him afloat in the midst of all the madness.

Knowing that everyone's lived experience is as individual as the person having them, we also wanted to make space for health care professionals who affirm, support and care for members of our trans community.

Holly Savoy, PhD, is a psychologist and executive director of Charlotte Trans Health, a collective of multidisciplinary healthcare providers committed to a mission to reduce health and healthcare disparities for the trans community.

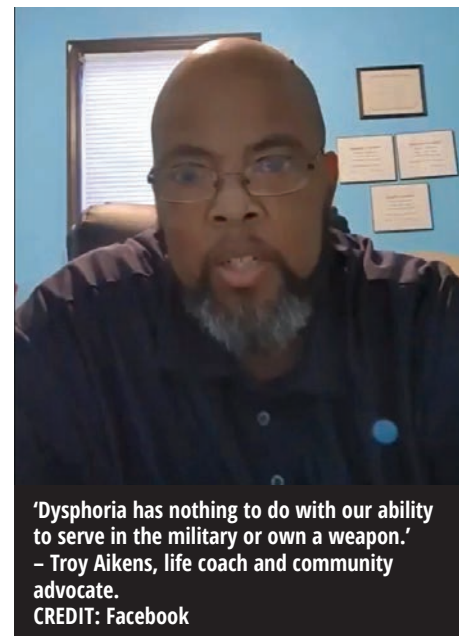
"Not all transgender people experience gender dysphoria and being trans is not a mental illness," Savoy explained. "Being transgender is not a disorder – it's an authentic expression of self and misrepresenting it as instability is both dangerous and discriminatory."

She went on to say what many folks are already thinking, whispering or even yelling; sentiments Aikens queried and rebuked. "Data shows that less than 0.1 percent of U.S. mass shootings in the past decade have been committed by trans people, whereas the overwhelming majority (over 97 percent) were carried out by cisgender men."

Savoy cautioned, "Attempts to use identities as grounds to strip away rights – like the right to own firearms – are rooted in prejudice, not science. Public safety should be informed by evidence, not stigma and targeting trans people only fuels misinformation and discrimination. The real crisis isn't trans identities; it's a system that protects those most likely to harm them."

So, where do we go from here? After all, right now it's all just talk, or is it? Reverend Sonja Lee, Founder and Director of Lionel Lee Jr. Wellness Center (which publishes Transparent Magazine) left us with this: "In a climate of rising anti-transgender violence

and legislation, the right to bear arms is essential for the safety and protection of transgender individuals who, as we know, are disproportionately targeted for hate crimes. I call upon transgender allies and social justice advocates to stand in solidarity with the trans community to oppose any effort that would strip them of their Second Amendment rights. We must vote every time the polls open. We must develop and implement strategies to retain the rights of all transgender individuals." ::



'Dysphoria has nothing to do with our ability to serve in the military or own a weapon.' – Troy Aikens, life coach and community advocate.
CREDIT: Facebook



Aly Jamison, a trans woman and professional dog groomer calls the possibility of barring trans individuals from owning guns 'complete poppycock.'

'Milena and Margarete'

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Contributing Writer

"Milena and Margarete"
by Gwen Strauss
©2025, St. Martin's Press
\$29.00
304 pages

Boy meets girl. That's how countless romantic novels and sappy movies usually start. Clumsy boy meets irritated girl, they argue, they split, they realize their love, and violins play. You know, of course, that real life is nothing like that at all, it's messier and louder. And in the new book, **"Milena and Margarete" by Gwen Strauss**, it can be tender, but dangerous.

So many coincidences.

When Ravensbruck, the Nazi concentration camp for women, was first in operation, it was more lax than other camps nearby. Says Strauss, it was still a prison, but there were flowers planted there, and the head guard gave her prisoners more freedom.

In early 1940, though, the power between prisoner's blocks abruptly shifted, causing positions of influence within the

population to change.

When she arrived in Ravensbruck that year, activist Grete Buber-Neumann's language and interpersonal skills put her in place to be appointed room elder in the *Asoziale* block, the lowest of Ravensbruck's caste system. Later, she was appointed block elder, which gave Grete more privileges around the camp, which was cleaner than the Gulag where Stalin had sent her years before. More privileges allowed opportunities to receive quietly-passed messages like the one from Milena Jesenska, requesting a "meeting."

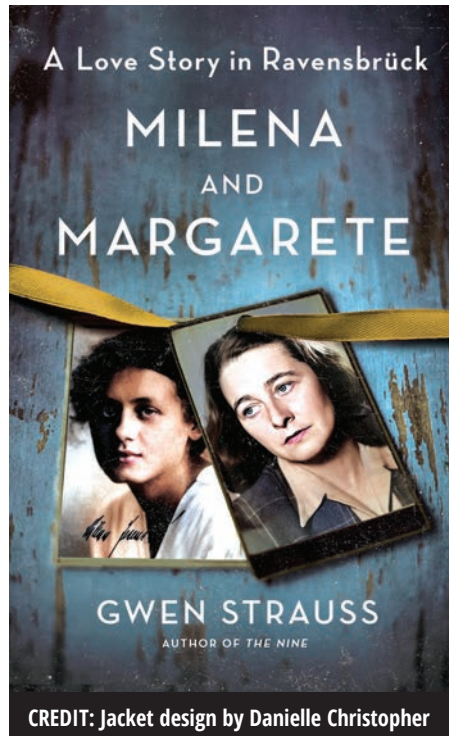
It was a meeting Grete would remember for the rest of her life.

Grete had never loved a woman before but she was smitten with Milena. As the daughter of a famous man, Milena enjoyed limited protection from the cruelty of the camp's commandant, and Grete was captivated. When mere touches mattered, the women met away from guards and the commandant, away from prying informants, as often as they dared.

"The language... we have today," says Strauss, didn't exist to explain the relationship between Grete and Milena, but the Nazis considered them as "other" and abnormal.

Among Ravensbruck's prisoners, they were known as "passionate friends."

And people like them would be targeted for extermination....



history here, which means that this story is wrapped so very tightly inside brutality and horror that finding any softness takes a wince, a deep breath and a strong stomach.

In her afterword, author Gwen Strauss explains how she discovered this tale and how she was drawn to Milena's life and her bravery. Throughout, Strauss nicely frames social attitudes from then and now, helping readers understand how astounding this account is, while simultaneously waving aside archival records written by people who were not gay or lesbian. She purposely avoided certain terms, too, which helps readers to immerse themselves in the story without conclusion or judgment.

Strauss admits using some imagination in penning this book, so be aware that what you'll read is well-researched but at least somewhat novelized. If you can handle the fictional parts, the stomach-churning brutality of it, and the heartbreak inside "Milena and Margarete," though, it might be the most compelling book you'll ever meet.

* * *

Want more? Then look for "The Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz" by Anne Sebba (also from St. Martin's Press). It's the story of the women and girls who formed the orchestra that played music to concentration camp inmates on their way to and from work each day. It's a tale of survival and brutality, so be warned. ::

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Humming along: An interview with Dar Williams

Out in Music: Musician and LGBTQ+ ally talks about her latest record and feeling alive



by Gregg Shapiro
Contributing Writer

"Hummingbird Highway" (Righteous Babe) is the new album by beloved singer/songwriter, and longtime LGBTQ ally, Dar Williams. Her first new studio recording in four years, "Hummingbird Highway" ranks with the best of her musical work, from "Mortal City" through "Promised Land." An amazing and varied sonic experience, ranging from the contemporary Americana of the title track to the stunning pop of "All is Come Undone," the jazzy bossa nova of "Tu Sais Le Printemps," the raucous rockabilly of Williams cover of "I Want to See the Bright Lights Tonight," and the exuberant "Maryland, Maryland," this is a harmonic highway worth traveling repeatedly.



Dar Williams' latest album is called 'Hummingbird Highway.'
CREDIT: Carly Rae Brunault

Gregg Shapiro: Your new album, "Hummingbird Highway," is being released on Ani DiFranco's Righteous Babe Records label. How did this come to be?

Dar Williams: We were looking for a label. Even if Ani and I were as close as we are now in the '90s, I never would have asked about being on the label because you don't do that to your friends. You don't put them on the spot. But the truth is, she has this wonderful relationship with her label, where she has a lot of artistic control and a lot of artistic say, but at the same time, a lot of the business and the day-to-day is run by a hand-picked, fabulous team. My team could reach out to her team and, in case it wasn't a fit; she and I didn't have to have an awkward conversation <laughs>. It's a very admired business team. But then, in my heart of hearts, I love everybody on the label. I love the ethos of the label, which is that we all kind of look out for each other, which is very much an echo of the music community that we're part of. The idea that I'm a part of something where we all sort of check in with each other in terms of how we can share some frequencies was also really appealing. It felt like a homecoming when we got the thumbs up quickly that this was a fit. There's a part of me <laughs> that

would like to say they're really good business people <laughs>. There's also Ani, and the love in the room, as people say.

GS: With the new record and new label comes a new Dar Williams. To my ears, you are doing things that feel super fresh, including the new single "Tu Sais Le Printemps," which sounds like the jazziest tune you've ever written. Would you agree that, in some way, this album represents a new you?

DW: No, it's the old me that's always worked with people, like Righteous Babe, who say, "Whatever you're doing, keep doing it. If you're writing a jazzy song or a blues song or a disco song." I lead a songwriting retreat, and it's what I say to the retreaters. If you're starting a song, and it's interesting to you, and it's new territory, just keep exploring the new territory. That's something that I say to people creatively. The fact that I've been able to work with teams who encouraged me to do that professionally, at this point, it's a habit. I thought, "I'm writing a song. It's very bossa nova, and it's in French. Let's see what happens!" Then it was all in French, and I was like, "Girl, you have high school French. This isn't working." So, I just accented with French.

GS: The rousing title song, "Hummingbird Highway," features guest vocals by Amy Ray, and I love the way your voices complement each other. How did this collaboration come to pass?

DW: I always heard her voice there. I also, frankly, wanted the voice of a friend who has experienced all the excitement and ups and downs of a very fast-moving, beautiful career. Who also had a personal life. Down in Atlanta, there's a whole community of friends and family that I know about around the Indigo Girls. I know that she has this very rich personal life. She and I have seen each other in Montana. We toured together down the West Coast. She has her own band, and we did co-bills with her band in 2024 that were astounding.

GS: Coast to coast.

DW: Exactly, literally! She seemed to me to have the spirit of the song, and also her voice. We sang together on the road. Sometimes you can love a person, but the voices are not there. We were there, so I knew that would work.

GS: You do have a lengthy history of recording with great guest vocalists, including Ani, Amy, Gail Ann Dorsey, Shawn Colvin, Suzanne Vega and others. How do you choose your guest vocalists, and how do you know that they are the right ones for the song?

DW: I do hear voices in my head, so as not to get too attached to one outcome or another. I hear a certain kind of voice in my head, and then I look at the Rolodex of friends and think, who will say "yes" <laughs>. I didn't know John Popper [of Blues Traveler], but we became friends because he sang and played harmonica on a song, and it was fantastic. I wrote to Shawn [Colvin] and said, "There's a voice that I'm hearing, of a person that I know, and I can ask this person, but I don't think that they would get it. I just want you. Is that OK?" She said, "Sure!" and she did it. Basically, you ask and hope that people say yes. And if

they're busy, that's cool, too. But these are all friends, and I just thought they would get it, and that our voices would go, too.

GS: You're also known for including cover tunes such as "Whispering Pines," "Comfortably Numb" and "Midnight Radio." The new album is no exception, with the inclusion of Richard Thompson's "I Want to See The Bright Lights Tonight." Why did you choose to cover that song?

DW: We have two versions of the song. Richard is a radical, from what I can tell. His heart is so huge, and he's so compassionate. But I have always heard "I Want to See the Bright Lights Tonight" as a very tongue-in-cheek celebration of really crass consumerism <laughs>. To me, it has a very funny, couple of drunken nights, rolling on the floor. The chaos of going out on a Saturday night, and I need to spend money <laughs>. I thought it sounded like a raucous rockabilly song. I brought it in, and these guys...working with professional musicians, you toss a few names around of songs that you love that you think fit that, and they say, "How about this?" and the next thing you know, they dial it in. All of them knew how to dial it in. Rich Hinman has a lot of electric guitar things that he was able to infuse into the song. It was off and running pretty fast.

GS: You also include more of your trademark "persona" songs. What can you tell the readers about "Maryland, Maryland," for example?

DW: [Congressman] Jamie Raskin is a friend of mine. They were retiring the Maryland state song because it's racist. He said, "This is great! Let's write a new state song. I'm gonna send you a list of all of the things I love about Maryland." <Laughs> it was crazy! It was Obergefell [vs. Hodges], very difficult to rhyme, of course. Billie Holiday lived there, and also Rachel Carson. Jamie loves two historical figures deeply: Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. So, Frederick Douglass had to be in there. The Freedom Train was very important to him. But then he was like, Cal Ripken...<laughs> and I couldn't do it. Then he wrote a song with the Labor Chorus, which was wonderful. It was beautiful and had many verses, like a sprawling, beautiful history of Maryland. I was like, "Jamie, I failed." Then I thought, "Wait, what if I write a song about Jamie. The line where it all came together was "Maryland was where I dreamed I'd be a force of good, for all. Because his dream is to create a beautiful world for everybody. It's so much from the ethos of marching with his parents and marching with and knowing Thurgood Marshall. So, my Maryland song that I wrestled with for years became a Jamie song and wrote itself.

GS: Does he love it?

DW: He does! I don't know if you've met him, but he's a very enthusiastic person. I could probably have written something really crap-o, and he would be pleased. He's just very positive.

GS: Lastly, you have established yourself as an activist throughout your career. What recommendations do you have for fans who want to have their voices heard at this critical moment?

DW: I was sitting down to write a song recently, and I felt so alive. I think feeling alive counts. My friend Fr. John Deare, he's one of those priests who gets arrested for pouring blood on torpedoes...

GS: You thanked him in the liner notes.

DW: Yes! I love him and he's a very dear friend. He has a podcast called "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast." He had a woman [on] named Michelle Dunn, who's part of the lay Franciscan order. They were talking about why we go to protests, why we show up. She said, "It's about doors." You show up and you feel the community around you. You feel the energy of your beliefs and your cause. Then you see the next door. Maybe the next door is you go home and start a letter writing group or the next door is running for office. By showing up together, it shows us the next door. I think that explained to me why sitting down to write a song and feeling so alive and feeling what it is to be alive on a living planet, shows me the next door. When I lead the



'I love songs ... we can bring into our politics ... they speak to the human scale and the human order.' – Dar Williams
CREDIT: Carly Rae Brunault

songwriting retreat, it's a very safe space for a lot of different kinds of lives that we live. Being together, writing songs together, lets us be alive and creative together. A lot of people, I felt, could see the next door, which is feeling that support and love, and maybe taking that to the streets. I've always been a person who believes that the music is the thing for a lot of people. But gathering to create and make music together or experience music together is also a lever of social progress. Because you're in a place with harmony and softened hearts and the strength of your human beliefs. I'm an advocate for that on any level, even if you're singing the French song, which I wrote in the middle of a really terrible time politically. [Singer/songwriter] Beth Nielsen Chapman said, "I would love nothing more than a sentimental bossa nova French song about the blush of the moon. Do it, do it! <laughs>." I love songs with messages that we can bring into our politics. I don't call them political songs, but they speak to the human scale and the human order. They critique these human creations of war and government within the political realm. I think that's a wonderful education for young people; to see the human element in society. Feel alive, be alive, feel strong in the love around you, and then look for the next door. I think music is a way that we remind ourselves to look for and then find the next door. ::

Our People: Earl Martin

Therapist, author and podcaster talks about helping yourself and those around you



by L'Monique King
Qnotes Staff Writer

We're living in stressful times. Anti-LGBTQ+ legislation seems to be at an all-time high and most media outlets are inundating us with tragedies that just make us want to go back to bed with the covers pulled over our heads.

However, there are still rays of hope and people right within our communities doing the work to keep us sane, whole and focused on a more positive future. Earl Martin is one of those rays of light in a world that can seem quite dark and daunting.

Originally from Columbia, S.C., Martin is a Winthrop University graduate, practicing therapist, podcaster and author residing in Charlotte. Today, Martin identifies as a Black gay professional, but if he could he'd awake as an African elephant. During this interview we learned a little more about Martin, his work, joys and a stellar memory that makes him well suited to becoming an elephant.

L'Monique King: How long have you been in Charlotte and what brought you to the area?

Earl Martin: I've been here since August 2017. I went to school in Rock Hill and when I graduated, I wanted to live somewhere that was far enough yet close enough from home; Charlotte seemed to be that place - I love it. I think Charlotte is really its own pocket of the south with a good combination of all the demographics. I have a lot of friends [living in the area] and many are therapists also. The move itself has been good for my career.

LMK: You mentioned having friends who are therapists. As a child, is that what you wanted to be when you grew up?

EM: Actually, I wanted to become a criminal justice attorney. <Laughter> Crazy as hell! I don't like court, but for some reason, I was an intern for the Department of Juvenile Justice during my senior year of undergrad. During my internship I learned that I hate the bureaucracy, tone and energy of courtrooms. I'm just not a fan and it's in my nature to challenge authority. I think that's why I'm a social worker today. I was on a law track in high school but when I got to college, I felt it was more impactful to be a therapist and assist people with challenges in their lives, addressing trauma, versus being in a courtroom and helping you with a case. In my last role I was an intimate partner violence therapist for the county. I still ended up being in the courtroom helping those survivors with their cases - providing background and treatment for their mental health.

LMK: As a therapist, does your profession pose any challenges with friends or family? Are you ever burdened by folks who are close to you routinely seeking your advice or mental health expertise?

EM: No. My friends are very respectful of boundaries. With my friends, my conversations are rooted in therapy but

delivered in general conversation. However, in emergencies, I'm good with providing resources but it's not an everyday thing. I'm the friend that shows up and will listen - I'm very intentional about my relationships and will show up for the smallest of things. When I'm engaging my clients, I say to them, "You are the captain. I'm here to assist you in navigating your life goals." I don't tell people what to do. As a trauma therapist, I'm here to help you unravel the tapestry of your life - not tell you what to do.

LMK: Considering the current climate of anti-LGBTQ legislation have you noticed any upticks in mental health conditions with the LGBTQ community?

EM: My practice was built and geared towards Black LGBTQ individuals. Anxiety is there but I don't think there's an uptick. As Black folks, with our intersectionality, most of what's going on is not surprising and our resilience has shown through. But again, with the world seeming like it's on fire and changing every day - anxiety is something I've noticed. Along with uncertainty, which feeds anxiety.

LMK: What suggestions can you offer to folks who are feeling overwhelmed, anxious or depressed?

EM: Let's root ourselves in the facts. Many times, anxiety is the fear of the unknown. Many times, we create narratives that aren't necessarily rooted in reality. If you're going to look at the worst-case scenario also look at the best-case scenario - [your outcome] most likely could fall somewhere in the middle. I'm always about doing what's in your control. Find pockets of joy and create that for yourself. There's no such thing as balance - it's about creating harmony. Life is like water; there are ebbs and flows. Sometimes you'll have control, sometimes you won't. So, the real lesson in life is learning how to pivot. When your toolbox is rooted in tools like boundaries, coping and pivoting - your resiliency increases and so does your window of tolerance.

LMK: If metamorphosis was within your control and you could wake up tomorrow as an animal, what would you be?

EM: An African elephant <laughs>. I love what elephants represent and their memories, of which I have the same capacity. It's a blessing and a curse. Fun fact, I'm obsessed with animals, always have been. You'd think I would be a zoologist. My mom still calls randomly to test me with animal facts to see if I still know lots about animals. She strives to get me one day with a fact I'm unaware of.

LMK: Are you partnered?

EM: I am not - I want to be. I want someone who is considerate, committed, ambitious and family oriented. Being partnered with someone who is considerate is the biggest thing for me. I don't think most people are as considerate as they think they are.

LMK: Who buoys your positive mindset? Who are your top three cheerleaders?

EM: Can I have four?

LMK: Absolutely.

EM: First, my mom. Then my three best friends, Victoria, Sierra and Alfred.



Charlotte area therapist Earl Martin.

LMK: What would your besties say is your worst trait?

EM: I'm very no nonsense. If you're bringing chaos, I have no problem cutting people off. People love to say grace, grace, grace. But grace in itself is a privilege - and not everyone deserves that privilege; [it] depends on the offense. I believe people should lead with grace, but it doesn't necessarily mean that connection remains. So, my friends would probably say it's my best and worst quality.

LMK: Tell us about your podcast. We know that grits are a staple in southern comfort food but didn't know you could get a serving via a podcast. Can you shed some light on that for our readers?

EM: G.R.I.T.S [stands] for Gays Raised in the South. It's about amplifying the voices of Black queer individuals with an emphasis on Black gay men raised in the south and how the south shows up for us in our unique experiences.

LMK: What prompted you to get into podcasting?

EM: Honestly, my co-hosts and I have all known each other since college - sharing over 10 years of friendship. We found ourselves always having these deep conversations. We were all raised in the south but had different experiences. So, instead of just talking about it we decided to be about it. It's going well though two of the four co-hosts have moved out of Charlotte. One is now in D.C. and one relocated to Chicago; so we're doing more virtual work right now.

LMK: As someone with such a warm and easy-going demeanor, what makes you frown?

EM: Ignorance! Ignorant people and terrible drivers. Thankfully a lot more things make me smile than frown. But ignorance and intolerance make my skin hot. I really do not like people who lack empathy and compas-

sion, that drives me up a wall. Then there's people smacking when they eat or dragging their feet when they walk - I hate that.

LMK: As the captain of your own life, what self-improvement goals are you navigating?

EM: I am working on letting folks in more.

LMK: We've heard, one such way of letting people in is through a new book you're a contributing author for. What's Queering EMDR Therapy about?

EM: It's an anthology of traditional academic essays, tools for EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) Therapists, poetry, personal narratives, visual art and even a short graphic novel. LGBTQ+, neurodivergent, kink-affirming and polyamorous perspectives are all included in Queer EMDR Therapy. All the contributors are EMDR Therapists. I'm one of 26 contributors and very proud to be part of this. In my chapter, I explore "EMDR: An Intersectional Lens from a Black Gay Man Raised and Practicing in the South." I also created the [graphic] collage to go with the chapter.

LMK: Assuming that you've seen all the social media hubbub about rapper Snoop Dogg's comments on same gender loving people being reflected in children's films, any comments or words of advice to Snoop?

EM: I don't have/offer advice for grown folks who have access to Google. There's a ton of information and knowledge to be found on the internet. And I'm talking evidence-based peer reviewed articles, not Facebook.

LMK: How about parents of LGBTQ youth? Any words of wisdom for them?

EM: Your job is to love your child. Love your child. Have conversations and allow your own window of tolerance to stretch so you can learn. Your child is your teacher and you are your child's teacher as well. ::

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