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5 New Books to Support Transgender Youth in School and Beyond

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

Five books out this year offer invaluable resources for educators and others seeking to support transgender and gender nonconforming students and make schools places where children of all gender identities may learn and flourish.

"Gender-Inclusive Schools: How to Affirm and Support Gender-Expansive Students," by David Edwards (Free Spirit Publishing), is a practical guide full of tips and advice to help

see **MOMBIAN**, page 4



Kamala and the crazy uncle

Harris baits Trump into showing his unfitnes

by Richard J. Rosendall | rosendall@starpower.net
contributing writer

"He's really doubling down on the crazy uncle vibe this evening," said Pete Buttigieg of our 45th president's debate performance on September 10.

The next morning, two main stories led cable news: the trouncing of Donald Trump by Vice President Kamala Harris in the debate, and the twenty-

third anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attack on America.

In 2001, a few days after 9/11, a friend said quietly over dinner, "If you were grading people on terrorism, they would get an A+." Indeed. All they had

see **ROSENDALL**, page 4

Meet the straight ally who is protesting Ghana's anti-LGBTQ bill



Texas Kadri Moro protests on the street of Accra, Ghana, Thursday Sept 12, 2024. AP photo by Mieser Apsuwu.

By Francis Kokutse
Associated Press

ACCRA, Ghana (AP) — Texas Kadri Moro stood in the middle of the hustle and bustle of Accra on Thursday, dressed in short pink Speedos and a pink polo shirt. Accompanied by trumpet players, carrying a banner with slogans including, "Why should a society of evildoers judge others?" and "Justice begins where inequality ends!" he marched across the Ghanaian capital in a one-man protest against a highly controversial bill which targets members of the LGBTQ+ community and their supporters.

see **GHANA**, page 7

Dani's grand opening gives Boston its first lesbian bar in years



Patrons standing outside the grand opening of Dani's Queer Bar at 909 Boylston St. in Boston on Thursday, Sept. 12, 2024. Photo by Rachel Armary, GBH News.

By Rachel Armary
Courtesy GBH News

Hundreds of members of the local LGBTQ+ community lined up in Back Bay on Thursday night to celebrate the opening of Dani's Queer Bar. It's the city's first venue in over a decade to cater specifically to women who are attracted to other women, along with trans and nonbinary people.

Thursday's opening had been a long time coming. A fundraiser for the effort launched in March 2022, and Dani's was originally slated to open last year. That time frame was pushed after a number of

see **DANI**, page 7

Anti-trans laws may complicate access to the ballot for trans voters

This story was originally published by The 19th.

Advocacy groups are mobilizing to safeguard access to the ballot as states implement laws that could deter trans people from voting in November

by Barbara Rodriguez,
and Grace Panetta
The 19th

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In Kansas, lawyers for the American Civil Liberties Union have drafted a letter reminding election workers that a gender marker on a person's identification does not need to match or correspond to a voter's gender expression. Staff



Image by Barbara Gibson for The 19th.

for the organization have also held clinics elsewhere to prepare trans Americans for the identification requirements they will have to navigate.

In eight battleground states, the nonprofit VoteRiders is on the ground helping voters get the identification they need to cast ballots in the November election — and one that reflects who they are.

Equality Florida, the state's leading

LGBTQ+ advocacy group, is holding "know your rights" trainings in the wake of new regulations barring many transgender voters from obtaining photo identification that reflects their gender.

As Republican politicians push anti-transgender rhetoric ahead of a historic election, transgender and nonbinary

see **ANTI-TRANS**, page 5



"It would be Joanna Gleason in 'Into the Woods'. I should have won for 'Anything F*&#NG Goes', OK? I love you, Joanna, but you robbed me."

—Patti LuPone's response to Aubrey Plaza's question on "Hot Ones Versus": "While you are a three-time Tony winner, you are also a five-time Tony loser. Which of the actresses that beat you deserved their win the least?" Ladies and gentlemen, Patti LuPone—National Treasure!

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

Photo via Patti LuPone, Facebook

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Of men and masculinity

The Hombres, co-presentation of regional premiere by Gloucester Stage Company and Teatro Chelsea At Gloucester Stage, through September 22. Gloucesterstage.com or 978-261-4433. At Teatro Chelsea, Chelsea Theatre Works, September 27-29.



Patrick Patrick O'Konis as Miles and Ricardo "Ricky" Holguin as Julian in "The Hombres." Photo by John Crow Photography.

By Jules Becker
Contributing Writer

Gloucester Stage and Teatro Chelsea have begun a truly momentous collaboration with immediately very satisfying results. The former is closing out its 45th anniversary season with the latter co-presenting the regional premiere of a provocative and strikingly affecting effort entitled "The Hombres." Lovingly directed by Teatro Chelsea co-artistic director Armando Rivera, this striking 2022 work by gay Latino playwright Tony Meneses (a Mexican-American from Guadalajara) explores not only what it means to be a Latino male but also the nature of friendships and intimacies between men.

Set "somewhere off the New Jersey Transit line," "The Hombres" finds three Mexican construction workers—Hector, Beto and Pedro—busy with a luxury condominium project. John Holmes embellishes their uniforms with a kind of surreal lighting, while Julian Crocama provides an authentic sound design at the job site—an impressive metal construct from Kristin Loeffler. As they work, the three pay undue attention to the (unseen) women taking yoga classes at the nearby studio in center stage. Early on, Julian, the gay Latino instructor, receives a complaint about the voyeuristic trio making the women uncomfortable as they stretch and execute their yoga moves.

For his part Julian has been afraid of men in some ways since experiencing a crush as a fourth grade on his school's innocent bus driver (a disarming back story anecdote). He may be attracted to Miles, a handsome married non-Latino and at first his only male student and one seen in a Fordham University sweatshirt (the playwright's actual alma mater). The attraction is suggested when he later finds discomfort as Miles unselfconsciously strips down to his underwear to change out of his yoga clothes.

By contrast, Julian's fellow Latinos initially keep their distance. Their job site conversation includes unsurprising exchanges about family and weekend get-togethers and sardonic joking about more affluent counterparts vacationing on the Jersey Shore. A sharp insight speaks of the rich pitting middle class Blacks, Mexican-

Americans and others against each other.

Playwright Meneses soon brings nuance to the interests and goals of the seemingly machismo-dominated co-worker friends. It all begins with Hector. Separated from his wife and only seeing his kids on weekends, the troubled job site manager finds himself drawn to the benefits of yoga. As a former school custodian, he persuades Julian to train him in yoga in exchange for helping to clean the studio at night. Reducing his own anxiety and worry through training, Hector encourages Julian to return to the pursuit of modern dance. Not threatened by Julian's sexual orientation, he observes that Hombres should know not to be afraid of each other. Later Pedro and even Beto—ostensibly gay but possibly subconsciously attracted to Julian—begin their own training. A change in Hector's fortunes has an alarming and timely message about the ongoing mistreatment of hard-working immigrants intent on becoming citizens.

"The Hombres" never treats these essentially different men as caricatures. Throughout Meneses depicts Julian, the three construction workers and Miles as men allowing their respective identities as men to evolve both individually and together. Under Rivera's sharp direction, the five very talented actors become what is unquestionably one of the best ensembles of the year. Ricardo "Ricky" Holguin—both with hair tied up and later let down—captures Julian's shimmering humanity and complex inner battle about friendship and intimacy. His moves during a sequence from Julian's modern dance art make the yoga instructor's dreams visually arresting. Patrick O'Konis has Miles' inner confidence about having a drink with Julian and his sincerity about being his friend. Arthur Gomez is a revelation as complicated but soulful Hector. Gomez' exchanges with always convincing Luis Negron as good friend Pedro are wonderfully natural and heartfelt. Jaime Jose Hernandez—a founding member of Teatro Chelsea—catches Beto's tricky evolution from volatility to understanding.

Julian tellingly advises to hold people close. Gloucester Stage and Teatro Chelsea's luminous collaboration makes "The Hombres" a very embraceable 100-minute enlightenment about men and masculinity.



Laughs, and more, in Spanish

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

Each year, from September 15 to October 15, Latinx History Month is celebrated. The Speak-Easy Stage Company begins the month with "Laughs in Spanish" by playwright Alexis Scheer. It is a fast-paced 90-minute play with no intermission, part mystery and part telenovela-style comedy that keeps you laughing from beginning to end.

However, make no mistake that "Laughs in Spanish" is all belly-laughs. While the play keeps you in hysterics, its message is profound and provocative, shedding light on debunking stereotypes, the complications of mother/daughter relationships, and the politics of code-switching.

"Laughs in Spanish" is a snapshot of the Cuban and Colombian-American culture of Miami's Wynwood arts district. The play opens on the eve of Mariana's, a galleryist, career-defining show at Art Basel, and she discovers the entire collection of paintings from her star artist has vanished.

To further complicate matters, her mostly-absent, once-famous movie star mother, Estella, arrives in town with an agenda to solicit her daughter's assistance. However, learning of her daughter's crisis, the mother's well-meaning attempts to save the exhibit are hilarious.

Mothers and daughters

The mother-daughter relationship between Mariana and Estella is at the heart of the story. Their relationship is fraught with complications—anger, guilt, hurt, and there's a need for reconciliation.

Estella is charismatic, regal, and an attention-grabber. She is a self-absorbed mother who sent Mariana to boarding school rather than raising her. Scheer depicts Estella as a nontraditional mother as another example of debunking stereotypes.

"I think what's unique here, at least in terms of the kinds of Latine stories that populate our stages and screens, is that, instead of a story about a mother sacrificing everything to support her daughter's wild ambitions, this is a story about a mother who went after her own dreams and sacrificed her relationship with her daughter. But their unconditional love for each other, I think, is what makes it feel classic."



From left: Rebekah Rae Robles and Luz Lopez. Photo courtesy of Nile Scott Studios.

The universal theme of forgiveness between mothers and daughters begins to mend their relationship.

Code-switching

"Laughs in Spanish" demonstrates the art of code-switching. "Laughs in Spanish" was written to be performed in English with brief portions in Spanish. Code-switching comes naturally to Scheer. Scheer, who now resides in Boston, is also Spanish-speaking and grew up in a multicultural and multilingual household in Miami. Her father is a white Floridian, and her mother is Colombian.

Scheer highlights that code-switching is not only related to race but also occurs in multiple Spanish-speaking cultures within the US. The largest and oldest Spanish-speaking community in Miami is made up of Cuban Americans. Now, the Spanish-speaking communities comprise Nicaraguan Americans, Venezuelan Americans, Mexican Americans, Dominican Americans, and Colombian Americans, to name a few.

The play also highlights the various nuances in Miami's Spanish-speaking languages—different dialects, accents, language combinations, and mannerisms—to project a particular identity. It is done to celebrate and accept what makes Miami a culturally rich and exciting place.

see **MONROE**, page 7

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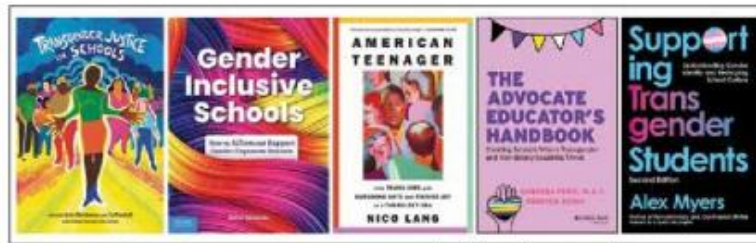
Continued from page 1

answer and take action on the question: "What do gender-expansive students need from their school communities to thrive?" While the book is aimed primarily at educators, it will also be useful for any adults in a school community, including parents.

Edwards draws on his own experience with discrimination against his transgender daughter, the hundreds of trainings and consultations he's given, and the work of many students, educators, parents, advocates, and researchers. He covers topics including social transitions, facilities access, sports and activities, daily gender-inclusive practices and policies, and more. Every chapter ends with helpful suggestions for responding to challenging questions and comments, questions for review and reflection, and a "check-in" on how the chapter aligns with the two guiding principles: "Support happy and healthy kids" and "Protect privacy and confidentiality." Edwards packs a lot into a little over 100 pages; this streamlined guide has a lot to offer.

Nevertheless, he admits that this "is not a comprehensive textbook" on creating gender-expansive spaces. More thorough is "The Advocate Educator's Handbook: Creating Schools Where Transgender and Non-Binary Students Thrive," by Vanessa Ford and Rebecca Kling (Jossey-Bass). Ford is a nationally recognized advocate for trans and nonbinary youth, former public-school classroom teacher, and mother of a transgender child; Kling is a trans woman and co-owner of the social impact consulting firm Better World Collaborative.

Their action-oriented guide is organized around a framework of four core principles: Educate, Affirm, Include, and Disrupt. It includes strategies and insights not only from Ford and Kling's personal and professional experiences, but also from the varied group of 52 teachers, researchers, advocates, parents, and trans and nonbinary students whom they interviewed. Each chapter is full of ideas, examples, and encouragement, as well as questions for self-reflection and for applying the learnings to specific real-world challenges. The authors also look closely at the intersection of students' trans or nonbinary identities with other aspects of iden-



tity. No matter where readers are in their journeys to make things better for trans and nonbinary students, this will be an indispensable guide.

"Transgender Justice in Schools," edited by Linda Christensen and Ty Marshall (Rethinking Schools), brings together essays and reflections by transgender educators and students (and a few allies), on ways that schools can work towards a vision where everyone, including transgender students, are able to thrive. The many authors draw on their own experiences as queer people and (mostly) as classroom teachers to show why such work is needed; to offer examples of their own work teaching trans-inclusive curricula; and to show how they have fought for the right to teach in LGBTQ-inclusive ways. One chapter, too, showcases the voices of trans students sharing ways their teachers and schools have supported them and the changes they would still like to see.

Each essay is full of real-world examples and practical advice—on curricula, inclusive practices, policy challenges, and more. Being an anthology with a plethora of voices, the overall book is not as systematic as the two volumes above, but will be a useful complement to them, particularly for classroom teachers.

"American Teenager: How Trans Kids Are Surviving Hate and Finding Joy in a Turbulent Era," by Nico Lang (Abrams), is not aimed specifically at educators, but feels like a crucial book for anyone engaging with young people today.

In all the debates about transgender youth, the voices of the youth themselves are often missing. Award-winning journalist Lang therefore spent a year traveling the country and spending hours with eight trans youth and their families, gaining insight into the lives and dreams behind the political rhetoric. This resulting volume gives us a powerful and personal look at these young

people and those who support them.

Lang weaves compelling and in-depth portraits of each teen's life, sharing everyday details as well as broader reflections from the youth and their families. They explain that "Rather than putting forward a grand unified theory of transgender teenhood or exploiting these stories to advance a polemical argument, I attempt to avoid flattening the complexity of their experiences." Instead, they focus on "the small moments that illuminate a life" and "the rich detail of human experience" in order to "allow transgender kids to express everything they've never been given the chance to say." It's a powerful approach.

The one overarching assertion Lang does make, however, is that "Transgender kids want the same things that all other kids want, and that begins with the ability to make their own decisions and choices, to find their way through trial and error, to feel validated and seen for who they are and what they desire." Parents, advocates, educators, policy makers, health care providers, and others should be less likely to doubt that after reading this vital volume.

Also worth a look is the recently updated second edition of "Supporting Transgender Students: Understanding Gender Identity and Reshaping School Culture," by Alex Myers (University of New Orleans Press). Myers, now an award-winning author, teacher, consultant, and speaker, was the first out transgender student at Phillips Exeter Academy and Harvard University. The book feels particularly useful for educators in independent/private schools.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a two-time GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory, plus a searchable database of 1,600+ LGBTQ family books.

Rosendall

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was sheer nerve, box cutters, and the element of surprise.

My friend is gone now. Those of us who survived the AIDS pandemic have grown old enough to die of other causes.

Much has changed, much has not. Two dozen years into the 21st century, America still has not elected a woman president. We would be foolish to take a Harris victory for granted, given the GOP's relentless vote suppression efforts. But Harris's strong debate performance, and Trump's display of derangement as she repeatedly and successfully baited him, give us a fighting chance.

Remaining poised and confident, Harris criticized Trump for many things, including his call for the death penalty for the Central Park Five, who were ultimately exonerated; his denigration of military service members; his inviting Taliban members to Camp David; and his claim to have saved Obamacare, which he repeatedly tried to repeal. Harris stressed the need for Americans to work across our differences to address our nation's challenges, in contrast to Trump's constant efforts to split us apart.

Harris was particularly strong in refuting Trump's claim that "everyone" wanted abortion law returned to the states: "You want to talk about, this is what people wanted? Pregnant women who want to carry a pregnancy to term

suffering from a miscarriage being denied care in an emergency room because the health care providers are afraid they might go to jail, and she's bleeding out in a car in the parking lot? She didn't want that. Her husband didn't want that. A 12- or 13-year-old survivor of incest, being forced to carry a pregnancy to term? They don't want that."

The moderators fact-checked several Trump lies, including his vile and idiotic claim that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio were eating people's pets. He now says he will deport the Haitians "back to Venezuela." The, um, Haitians are here legally.

Broadway composer Jerry Herman once wrote, "Time heals everything but loving you." I have visited the 9/11 memorial in lower Manhattan, as I visited the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt when it was displayed on the National Mall. I knew many of the people memorialized on quilt panels.

The impact of memorials changes as those who knew the dead grow old and die themselves. Over time, our perspectives on history also change. Recently, a statue of the late civil rights leader and congressman John Lewis replaced a Confederate monument in Georgia.

Depending on how this election goes, we have the prospect of Congressman Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) as Speaker. If Harris wins, she will need a Democratic House to get anything passed. Even if Trump is defeated, the fanatics he has empowered will not suddenly vanish.

We cannot afford to be like people in the past who won a war only to lose the peace. A prime example was after the Civil War, when Confederate veterans enraged over the emancipation of black Americans rampaged against them, murdering many and launching a century of Jim Crow.

Ghosts of the Civil War still haunt the squares and circles in DC, many of which feature statues of Union generals. But our history is not frozen, and neither is our collective memory. Public memorials take many forms, from street renamings to postage stamps. Whom we honor reflects our shared values.

By contrast, our collective sanity is in doubt when the crazy uncle has a good chance of gaining access to the nuclear launch codes.

There is reason for cautious optimism as the election approaches. Yet democracy, the rule of law, and universal rights remain under serious threat from an autocratic madman and his white supremacist allies who appear eager to burn the country down if they don't get their way.

Kamala Harris has done America a signal service with her magnificent debate performance. It is up to all of us to ensure that the promise she represents is fulfilled.

If we fail, we lose not just an election, but a better future. There will be no memorial to that.

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Anti-trans

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Americans are facing new laws and rules that effectively prohibit them and others from obtaining documentation like birth certificates and driver's licenses that align with their gender identities.

Advocates are fighting back. They've been mobilizing communities and organizing resources to help transgender Americans, an effort aimed at safeguarding their civic rights. Some trans voters have expressed confusion and fear of discrimination at the ballot box that could discourage them from participating in public life.

"There is a chilling effect," said Lauren Kunis, CEO and executive director of VoteRiders, which helps voters obtain identification. "There is an unsafe and intimidating environment around existing as trans in society, and definitely in being able to go to the polls safely and cast a ballot."

The ripple effect could extend beyond trans people, these advocates warn. Regulations around gender impact cisgender people, particularly women and women of color. America's decentralized elections system relies on a temporary workforce tasked with enforcing varying policies around identification rules. In states that require voters to "reasonably resemble" the picture on their ID, like North Carolina and Wisconsin, the results could ensure anyone at the ballot box who doesn't fit the binary concept of masculinity and femininity traits.

"A lot is falling on poll workers to correctly enforce the law," Kunis added. "And I would argue that is less of a solid protection in states where anti-trans rhetoric is skyrocketing."

The measures often focus on sex classification that narrowly defines an individual's sex as either male or female at birth. They're among a broad scope of anti-trans legislation that have popped up in Republican-led statehouses in recent years and served as breeding ground for the binary vision of the country embraced by former President Donald Trump and U.S. Sen. JD Vance, his running mate on the Republican ticket. At least nine states in the past two years have explicitly regulated gender in this way, according to a tally by the Movement Advancement Project (MAP), which tracks LGBTQ+ policy.

And it's not just laws. Last year, Nebraska's governor issued a related executive order. In January, a Florida agency announced it would no longer update a trans person's driver's license with their correct gender identity. In August, at least one Texas agency, under directive from the state attorney general's office, implemented a similar policy.

Anti-transgender rhetoric was front and center at the Republican National Convention in July, and Trump has taken to verbally targeting transgender people in his campaign. He described Democratic vice presidential nominee Tim Walz recently as "very heavy into the transgender world."

The verbal attacks are against a group that is highly invested in electoral politics. An analysis released in August of respondents to the 2022 U.S. Transgender Survey, widely seen as the most comprehensive study of binary and nonbinary transgender Americans, found that voting-eligible trans people had cast ballots in the last presidential election at a higher rate than the U.S. population. The study included more than 92,000 respondents, including more than 84,000 adults who were 18 and older.

"Trans votes count," said Ankit Rastogi, director of research for the National Center for Transgender Equality, which conducted the survey and will soon be known as Advocates for Trans Equality Educa-

tion Fund. "I think the big takeaway is that our community is really trying to come out and make a difference through the democratic process."

The new laws and rules around sex classification vary widely. Those that intentionally target government identification that people use in everyday life, like driver's licenses, are particularly challenging. Forcing a person to show identification that does not align with their gender identity could out them to people in their community, as Lucas Cameron-Vaughn, an attorney for the ACLU of Tennessee, explained.

"Trans people, just like everyone else, want to be able to travel, start new jobs, open bank accounts, enroll in school, vote — all of those things require some form of ID. And so when a state goes out of its way to enforce its message about its belief about sex and gender on a license, and transgender people then have to publicize that when they show other people, it creates a dangerous environment," he said.

Last year, Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican, signed a bill into law that defines sex as "determined by anatomy and genetics existing at the time of birth." The state's Department of Safety and Homeland Security then created a rule banning transgender people from changing gender markers on their driver's licenses. The ACLU sued the agency for discrimination, claiming the rule was adopted illegally because it didn't follow proper administrative procedure.

Like with other laws targeting transgender people, including bans on transgender student-athletes from participating in women's sports, politicians supporting these policies frame them as protecting cisgender women.

"It's a tactic that's designed to splinter support for trans rights and suggest sort of who is harmed by protecting trans people — to frame that as cisgender women being the people harmed by protections for trans people," said Rose Saxe, who is deputy project director for the ACLU's LGBT & HIV Project.

Nearly 21 million voting-eligible U.S. citizens do not have a current driver's license, according to the Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement at the University of Maryland, whose research was partially supported by VoteRiders. Black and Hispanic people are among those most likely not to have a current license, so the requirement harms them too, regardless of their gender identity.

In the 2024 election, 38 states will require voters to show some form of identification at the polls, including 17 states that have new or stricter ID laws passed since 2020.

The full impact of these laws amid new and evolving voter identification laws is not yet clear, in part because of how recent they are — and that, experts say, could mask their harm. The Williams Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law, estimated ahead of the 2022 midterm election that more than 200,000 voting-eligible transgender Americans may find it difficult to vote at the time because of voter ID laws.

But these don't just affect transgender people. In many red states, Republican-led attacks on transgender people are going hand-in-hand with new identification requirements and other laws that pose barriers to the ballot that reach beyond gender lines.

"The states with the anti-trans laws are also the ones that are more likely to be passing anti-voter laws, full stop," Kunis said.

In Florida, which has emerged as a national epicenter of policies targeting LGBTQ+ people in recent years, the state's Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles issued a new regulation barring residents from updating their gender identity on

their drivers' license.

To Quinn Diaz, a public policy associate at advocacy group Equality Florida, the failure of most anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced in this year's legislative session showed that the tide in Florida is turning. But the new gender marker regulation signals yet another way that state agencies in Florida have overstepped their bounds and been "weaponized" to target transgender Floridians, they argued.

"We saw it as a move to inflict maximum chaos and misunderstanding," Diaz said. "And really to scare trans folks from even participating and getting the license if they needed to update it."

Even before the introduction of such regulations, transgender people around the country have had to jump through logistical and administrative hoops to get an affirming identification.

For transgender people, lacking identification that reflects their gender identity and appearance can make them vulnerable to discrimination in everyday situations at a bar or liquor store, for example, and in interactions with law enforcement and at the polls.

"With these laws in Florida, you're forced to choose between living authentically and just not really participating in public life," Diaz said.

Diaz, who is transgender, moved to Florida from Massachusetts, where they had an "X" gender marker on their driver's license. Because they didn't have all the necessary documentation and weren't established yet with a local provider when they transferred their license to Florida, they forfeited that marker and defaulted to a license with their sex assigned at birth.

Diaz said they didn't have any problems voting in person in the 2022 midterms, but they plan to vote by mail this November.

"I can imagine that a lot of trans folks in Florida who might not have access ... to an accurate and affirming ID might not want to engage in that process at all, especially in such a heightened political environment," Diaz said.

Such rhetoric could also be most dangerous in states where far-right groups are trying to recruit poll watchers. Since 2020, many Republican-controlled states have passed laws expanding the authority of those temporary election observers who work elections under certain rules and may feel compelled to stop someone from voting under the guise of stopping widespread election fraud, which has been repeatedly debunked.

"Gender nonconforming people are already under such public scrutiny nationwide," Diaz said. "That's when you're gonna see the convergence of those two elements. It really seems like it would only result in more discrimination, more discomfort for trans people, more interrogation and potentially just being turned away."

Hazel Krebs, a 42-year-old transgender woman living in Kansas, one of the states with a new anti-trans law, felt the weight of that increased scrutiny as she cast her ballot in March. Krebs wondered whether her identification — one that for weeks no longer reflected her gender identity — might impact her ability to vote.

She chatted with the election workers in the mostly empty precinct, then showed her ID. She did her homework, learned that gender is not required information to vote and showed up ready to explain it.

But no one questioned her. Krebs voted and was out of the polling site within minutes. Still, she worries that, under the same circumstances, another trans person might have stayed home.

"They won't stop me, but I can see how it would stop others," she said. "It is almost certainly stopping

some people from showing up at the polls."

The ACLU, which is tracking some of these laws and rules, has tried to prepare election workers on how to process trans voters who come into their polling sites. VoteRiders is conducting year-round voter education. While the driver's license is the most ubiquitous form of identification in the United States' car-centric society, Kunis wants to dispel the "common misconception" that it's the only form of ID people can use to vote.

Trans voters can obtain a U.S. passport or passport card that reflects their gender identity without needing to provide underlying documentation. However, that option may not be accessible to people who struggle to pay the related fees or may not have the time or knowledge required to fill out the forms and request the passport.

It's also a temporary solution if a future presidential administration rescinds the ability for people to self-attest their gender on their passports. Some advocacy groups and lawmakers in Florida also argue the state's new regulations conflict with the federal Real ID Act, but that question is unlikely to be resolved before November.

In addition to using passports as identification, Diaz said that Florida voters have the option to vote by mail, vote early in person and bring a friend or family member to the polls.

"Our ability to participate in this democracy in Florida, it's been on the line for a while," Diaz said. Transgender people, they said, are being "forced to choose between participating in our greatest civic right or just sitting out because the state doesn't see us for who we are."

It's still unclear how many trans people will be denied affirming identification — and how many will choose not to vote — as a result of these new regulations. Several of the new laws are written with no clear penalties.

"Something that's very frustrating for us at VoteRiders is you will never be able to capture the number of people who do not feel safe voting, and who therefore stay home. And you also won't be able to capture the people who are trans and show up to try and vote and are turned away," Kunis said. "And we know that is happening, but it is difficult to quantify."

Cameron-Vaughn said he also worries about a scenario where a trans person is stopped at a polling place because of mismatching information on their identification and must fill out a provisional ballot — a voting option that often requires a person to return at a later date with more documentation to ensure their vote is counted.

"There are definitely the physical dangers, the dangers for harassment, discrimination — but also ultimately voter suppression," he said.

Josie Caballero, director of voting and elections for the group that conducted the 2022 U.S. Transgender Survey, said it's important to remember that barriers to voting existed for trans people before the latest slate of laws and rules targeting sex classification, particularly around voter ID rules. Trans people turned out to vote despite those policy roadblocks.

"It really shows the resiliency of the trans community to ensure that our voices are heard and we have visibility at the ballot box," she said.

Krebs, who plans to vote in November, is worried about how the dynamics of a crowded polling site might impact her ability to vote. But she is determined to access the ballot, and to stay in Kansas despite the heightened scrutiny.

"There's nothing these laws will do to stop me from living my best life," she said. "It just puts my energy and passion towards making this place better for me and other trans people."

billy masters

Continued from page 1

Appropos of our opening quote, **Patti LaPone** is starring alongside **Mia Farrow** in a two-character play on Broadway called "The Roommate". Alas, they're one roommate short—Miss Farrow has been stricken with Covid. Filling in for her is the marvelous **Marsha Mason**. Of course, this will ruin one joke in the show—when Farrow's character gets a voice message from her son—unless Marsha typically gets calls from **Ronan Farrow**!

The big story of last week was the debate. And the winner was... **David Muir**. My favorite part of the debate was when they took a commercial break and showed a clip of Muir in a helicopter with his biceps bulging out of his T-shirt. OK, so the clip was 20 years old...but still. The paucity of skin shots of Davey online caused some ingenious Internetians to create some images. In many of these, Muir is sporting significantly more hair on his body than I suspect he has—not that I know firsthand. We'll share the real and the fake on BillyMasters.com.

I haven't gone to the Emmy Awards in person since the pandemic. But I don't feel like I missed much. Oh, sure, I'd drive my Chevy to either Levy, even if they were dry. I thought **Eugene and Dan** did a great job hosting. **Joshua Jackson** and **Matt Bomer** were moving and stylish in presenting the Governors Award to **Greg Berlanti**. And I loved how they worked in all the old stars. But perhaps next time someone could place **Candice Bergen** closer to the stage. She's still winded!! At least were already onstage when the curtain opened on the "Happy Days" reunion...which, needless to say, didn't include Chachi! While I don't watch TV as much as I used to, I was startled by **Andy Griffith's** transformation for the latest season of "Matlock"! I'm delighted any time I get to see **Carol Burnett**, but apparently she's not as funny as "The Bear". And maybe it's me, but I don't remember **Da'Vine Joy Randolph** in "The Honeymooners". But I was always Team Trixie!

There was another story that hasn't gotten nearly enough coverage. Surely you recall that in the early hours of June 18th, **Justin Timberlake** was arrested for drunk driving. But was he drunk? He refused a breathalyzer test (which all good lawyers suggest is a smart move). Last week in a Sag Harbor courtroom, Timberlake pleaded guilty to "driving while ability impaired" instead of "driving while impaired"—which I supposed is the difference between being tired and being drunk. He has to do 25-40 hours of community service and make a public safety announcement. He also paid a \$500 fine (add a few more zeros and you get an idea of what he paid his lawyers). After the hearing (to which he wore a pearl necklace), he said: "I try to hold myself to a very high standard for myself, and this was not that." I'd love for some English teacher to tell me how many rules he broke in that statement. Justin added, "This is a mistake that I made but I'm hoping that whoever's watching and listening right now can learn from this mistake. I know that I certainly have. And like I said—even one drink. Don't get behind the wheel of the car." Nice sentiment, but you still have to make the PSA!

In a somewhat related story, **JC Chazese** has been in the news. No, really—he has! Stop laughing! Apparently, he's teamed up with composer **Jimmy Harry** and will release an album next month. "Playing With Fire" is a 16-track concept album based on "Frankenstein"! I said stop laughing! The press release says it will blend electronic pop and classical music. The most curious thing about the press release was this tidbit—JC's legal name is Joshua!

I don't want to call **Sabrina Carpenter** a big fat liar—but that's exactly what I'm going to do. If you watched the VMAs last week (which I didn't), you know that Sabrina showed up wearing what she said was **Bob Mackie's** vintage gown made for **Madonna's** appearance at the 1991 Oscars. Sabrina said, "Madonna has always been incredibly supportive. Word got to her that I wanted to do a Madonna look tonight, 'cause of all the comparisons I get to her. And she literally sent me her Oscars dress. It was insane." And it sounds insane on so many levels—partially because I'm not entirely convinced Madonna knows who Sabrina Carpenter is! Then Carpenter's stylist, **Jared Ellner**, spilled the beans. "Madonna still has the custom gown Bob Mackie made for her in her archive, but the other sample piece is the dress I believe we have." So, for those of you keeping track, it sounds like he doesn't believe Madonna went down to FedEx and sent Sabrina a dress! 'Cause of all the comparisons, y'know!

Then **Britney Spears** weighed in. Britney didn't watch the VMAs—and that concludes this week's installment of "Things Britney Spears

and I Have in Common". Spears made it clear she too has no clue who Sabrina is. "This Sabrina girl said my name on the red carpet and I thought that was kind of cool...This Sabrina girl...Carpenter! Thanks! That's cool!" Britney chimed in because Sabrina paid homage to Spears' onstage kiss with Madonna by kissing an alien—and not the kinda alien that is eating all of the pets in a neighborhood. In this case, it was an actor wearing a costume made popular in that fantastic FOX special, "Alien Autopsy—Fact or Fiction?" (and I can answer that for you—it was fiction). Brimey says she saw the clip online and wanted to share her opinion. "Why is she kissing an alien onstage? I didn't understand that part. Why didn't she kiss a girl?" And that concludes this week's installment of "Things Britney Spears Doesn't Understand."

Speaking of Madonna, may I give her some unsolicited advice? Enough with the capes. Wasn't it bad enough when she was almost decapitated at the 2015 Brit Awards? For those of you who don't remember (as opposed to those of us who watch the video daily), Midge was standing backwards on top of a staircase, with her long cape blowing in the wind behind her. Dancers were supposed to pull the cape and it would tear away from her. Alas, she tied it a bit too tightly around her neck, and she went flying. I bring up this memorable moment in music history because last week Madonna was at the Luar show for NYC Fashion Week. Again, she's wearing a cape and thankfully she had at least three attendants helping her. This time, the culprit was a pair of thigh-high stiletto boots which almost caused her to tumble. Obviously she should have known better. I think it even says not to operate machinery or wear capes when taking Boniva! You can see the tumble and the near-miss on our website.

I might have missed the VMAs and the Emmys, but I am actually heading out to LA in a couple of weeks. Why? Because some of my favorite gals are getting together for a special show at The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills. "Mama, I'm a Big Girl Now" is a new show conceived for **Marissa Jaret Winokur**, **Kerry Butler** and **Laura Bell Bundy**—yes, the original Tracy, Penny and Amber from the Broadway musical "Hairspray"! They are reuniting for this fabulous show, which is subtitled "From Broadway Babies to Broadway Mamas". The show is on September 26th at 7PM and 9:30PM (FYI, I'm going to the late show). Now, I don't want to let the cat out of the bag ('cause I'm planning on having a snack during intermission), but I hear there might be some special guests. If I were you, I'd grab my ticket fast at TheWallis.org. BYOC (bring your own cat).

Our "Ask Billy" question made news everywhere, and yet Todd in Baltimore was the first one to tell me about it: "Is that tape of **Shannon Sharpe** having sex real? Can you actually see him? I can't find the video anywhere."

I must confess, I had no idea who Shannon Sharpe was/is. By now, I'm sure everyone knows that he is a very hot tight end. Well, you'd think that alone would get my attention. Admittedly, he's a retired tight end, but his photos look appealing enough (he's retired from playing football but can be seen on ESPN). Moving onto the video. In one of those instances you'd never find me in, Sharpe claims to have been having sex when he inadvertently recorded the tryst. "I threw my phone on the bed, engaged in an activity. I did not know IG Live. I've never turned IG Live on so I don't know how it works and all of a sudden my other phone started going off." I have to say I find this entire story somewhat suspect—especially since the phone happened to fall in a way that happened to record on Instagram Live, happened to not record any video showing him (aside from some fleeting skin), and happened to record at a particularly vocal moment of coitus with some guttural moans not to be missed. And, what do you know—prior to this nonvisual recording, there were gay rumors about Sharpe. Call me skeptical, but you can also call on me if you want to see (or hear) all. At BillyMasters.com, of course.

When we're sharing a sex tape for the blind, it's definitely time to end yet another column. Alas, this unseen Michelle is the only one who knows how tight his end actually is. But we're staying on it and should this tight end crack open, you'll hear about it on www.BillyMasters.com—the site that always gets to the bottom of things. If you wanna share a tip with me (or Shannon), send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Ronan leaves me a message! Until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.



David Muir

Photo by Heidi Gutman/ABC News



Eugene and Dan Levy

Photo via Schitt's Creek, Facebook



Britney Spears

Photo by marcier27, www.instagram.com/britneyspears

Dani

Continued from page 1

setbacks, including delays with permitting, according to an Instagram post from Dani's founder and owner Thais Rocha.

Lucia Martinez attended the opening after following the bar's progress on social media.

"I love going to Club Cafe. I love going to all of the gay bars in the city," she said. "But it's also really nice to have a place where I can go and just have a sort of different interaction with folks that are a part of maybe my smaller queer community."

Lesbian bars are few and far between in the United States. According to Newsweek, there were 32 lesbian bars nationwide as of March 2024. That number has increased

over the last few years, up from 21 bars in March 2022.

Bars that catered to a primarily sapphic client base were a fixture of Greater Boston in the 1980s and 1990s, including Somewhere Else in Boston's Financial District, the Marquee in Cambridge, and Fran's Place in Lynn, the first gay bar in Massachusetts.

The return of a lesbian bar to Beantown was a welcome sign to lifelong Boston resident Leslie Rosenberg, who was attending a concert in the area Thursday and ended up being the first person in line.

"I think it's way cool," she said. "It's about time for equal opportunity. There are so many gay bars for men, so this is wonderful."

Several people at Dani's opening night said they feel a different level of comfort and safety in sapphic spaces.

"I have gone out to gay bars where people bring their straight friends, and so if I did go ask [a woman] out on a date, it is possible that they are not gay," said an attendee Ames. "Venues coming here to Dani's, I feel like there's a 100% chance that if I asked somebody out they also will be gay, because that's the whole point of the space."

Thursday's grand opening also featured appearances and performances from a number of local drag artists, including Tara Dikhof and Andi Van Dyke.

"There's already lots of young people who are coming here, and this is the first time they've ever been in a lesbian bar," Dikhof said. "And what that means is there's going to be people who get married, who meet at Dani's... and it's going to change the entire landscape of South Boston. That's more powerful than I think any of us can understand."

Ghana

Continued from page 1

Moro is an unusual figure amid the LGBTQ+ rights activists in the coastal West African nation.

He is heterosexual, married to a woman, and a father of six. He is a teacher. And he is a practicing Muslim. Yet for months he has been conducting solo demonstrations against the bill, which criminalizes members of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as its supporters, including promotion and funding of related activities and public displays of affection. It could send some people to prison for more than a decade.

The bill was passed by Ghana's parliament earlier this year but has been challenged in the Supreme Court.

It has not yet been signed into law by President Nana Akufo-Addo, who cited ongoing proceedings. But he refused to reject it either.

"There are so many issues about rights" when it comes to the bill, Moro told The Associated Press.

"Homosexuality does not affect anyone," Moro said. "We have activities that people are doing in the country that are worse than homosexual activities," he added, citing adultery as an example. The parliament, he said, should be more concerned with "other crimes and pollution."

The bill has sparked condemnation from rights groups and some in the international community who have been concerned about similar efforts by other African governments.

Sponsors of the bill have said it seeks to protect children and people who are victims of abuse.

Gay sex is already illegal in Ghana, carrying a three-year prison sentence, but the new bill could imprison people for more than a decade for activities including public displays of affection and promotion and funding of LGBTQ+ activities.

Since he began his protests, Moro has lost his job, has not received any assistance from the LGBTQ+ community, and has become a target of "very hostile attacks from the Muslim community," he says.

But he is determined to continue. For him, it is about battling injustice.

"I know I'm doing something that God is asking me to do," he said.

To point out the hypocrisy of the bill, Moro carried a petition to the Parliament asking the government to withdraw foreign missions from countries where homosexuality is legal, if they find it "filthy," he said.

At the entrance to Parliament House, Kate Addo, Parliament's director of communications, received Moro's petition on behalf of the speaker. She said she was pleased with his initiative.

"We live in a democratic country where

what people do in their bedrooms is not to be anyone's concern," Addo said. "However, we are also regulated by law."

Even though Ghana's president delayed signing the bill into law, activists said that the debate by itself triggered an increase in physical and psychological violence against LGBTQ+ people.

Joseph Kobla Wemakor, the executive director of Human Rights Reporters Ghana, said that "abuse, both psychologically and physically against members of the community has skyrocketed" since the bill has been introduced.

"The moment people hear that you are part of this, the LGBTQ+, you are an enemy," Wemakor said. "They are looking forward to harru you, even lynching you, killing you."

They are "forgetting that we are all humans," he added.

"It takes one man to change the world," he said. "And if he has started something like that, other people will follow, because it (the bill) is a wrongdoing."

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tion in both film and theater. The depiction of their real lives is invisible and hidden. "When I was in graduate school in Boston, my professors encouraged me 'to go home' with my writing, to introduce audiences to the people and the culture I grew up with," Scheer shared.

Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway hit musicals *In The Heights* (2005) and *Hamilton* (2015) should not be the only plays, at present, that come to mind to American theater-going audiences. The stereotypes of Latinx portrayed in both film and theater as violent immigrants, fruit pickers, cooks, maids, or sex objects are demeaning and dehumanizing. And the hackneyed excuse for not financially supporting Latino projects that there's no market and they don't make money is a myth.

"Representation is an act of affirmation," Scheer told Bay State Banner. "I like to write Latinx stories that expand on the stereotypes the media presents and show audiences how diverse the Latino experience in our country is. And that includes joyful, light-hearted experiences!"

Seeing that "Laughs in Spanish" debunked these prevailing stereotypes and myths was refreshing. You'll laugh and enjoy the vibrant, funny, messy exploration of family and identity. Rush out to see it!

"Laughs in Spanish" runs five weeks, from September 13 – October 12, 2023, in the Roberts Studio Theatre in the Stanford Calderwood Pavilion at the Boston Center for the Arts, 527 Tremont Street, Boston. <https://www.bostontheatrescene.com/shows-and-events/laughs-in-spanish/>

Monroe

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"It's interesting and fun to discover in the play how much can be presented on stage while still being accessible to English-speaking audiences," Scheer shared in her *Speak-easy* interview. "It was equally enjoyable to incorporate Spanish to inform the characters without excluding those who don't speak Spanish. I found it crucial to bring this aspect of Miami's flavor and texture to the stage, as it authentically reflects the city's linguistic diversity."

Representation Matters

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