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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
RE: Naples Pride Files Lawsuit Against City of Naples
April 14, 2025

Naples Pride Stands Firm in Defense of the First Amendment

Naples, FL — Naples Pride filed a lawsuit on April 10, 2025—represented by ACLU Florida and Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP—along with a preliminary injunction over the weekend, against the City of Naples for violating our First Amendment rights by censoring our use of family-friendly drag as a form of celebration and by imposing discriminatory security fees that threaten our ability to hold our annual Naples Pride Festival.

This fight is not just about Pride. It's about the First Amendment.

“Our right to free speech does not disappear just because some people don’t like the message—or the people delivering it. If government officials can target our LGBTQ+ nonprofit today for political reasons, they can target anyone tomorrow. That should concern every citizen, regardless of political affiliation or identity.”

Cori Craciun, Executive Director, Naples Pride

Drag Is Not a Threat—It’s Art

Drag is a vibrant, creative expression that teaches us we can be whoever we choose to be—whether in a moment of performance or in life. Through comedy, costume, and showmanship, drag challenges rigid gender roles and societal norms. It invites audiences to see the world differently. That’s what art does.

"Just like opera or modern art isn’t for everyone, drag may not be for you. But if you try to impose your personal discomfort on others—on an art form that brings joy and meaning to so many—you’re saying the First Amendment shouldn’t protect everyone, only the speech you personally agree with."

Callhan Soldavini, Board Member of Naples Pride and In-House Counsel to the organization through Legal Aid Service of Collier County

Attempts to characterize Naples Pride’s drag as lewd or inappropriate are simply inaccurate. Come to our show and see for yourself. Or better yet, review the government investigations into our festival and drag performances—detailed in our lawsuit—which confirm that such accusations are entirely baseless.

Our opponents often equate drag with striptease, but that comparison simply doesn’t hold up. Not all drag is adult-themed. What makes drag a target is the gender identity and expression of the performer. Restricting it is not about decency—it’s about discrimination.

Naples Pride is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

A COPY OF OUR OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE FLORIDA DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES
BY CALLING TOLL FREE 1-800-435-7352 WITHIN THE STATE (CH-52070).

REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.

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“At Naples Pride, we stand firmly in our conviction that drag is a legitimate and respected art form—full stop. Characterizing drag or its performers as sexually motivated is not only wildly inaccurate, but also a blatantly discriminatory stereotype rooted in bias and prejudice. We will never bow to such bigotry; we champion inclusion and artistic expression, and we will unapologetically defend our drag performers and their right to express themselves freely through this art form.” *Debbie Gaffoli, Board Chair, Naples Pride*

Unjust Fees Are Hurting Our Community

Our lawsuit lays out how the City of Naples has imposed security fees that are significantly higher than those charged for other special events with far larger crowds, street closures, and hours—based not on objective criteria, but on the content of our message and anticipated backlash from opponents of LGBTQ+ rights. That is an unconstitutional “heckler’s veto.” Naples Pride only asks to pay the same fees, based on the same constitutional criteria as everyone else.

“It’s the government’s job to ensure public safety while also protecting free speech. That’s not just a logistical task—it’s a cornerstone of democracy. When that responsibility is shifted onto the speaker, free speech becomes a privilege for those who can afford it, not a right for everyone. And that’s not how the First Amendment—or democracy—works.” *Callhan Soldavini, Board Member of Naples Pride and In-House Counsel to the organization through Legal Aid Service of Collier County*

The Government is Taking Away Resources from its Community

Naples Pride is a small, grassroots nonprofit—serving its community with limited resources—and now Naples Pride is being forced to shoulder the financial burden for the government’s responsibility to protect both public safety and free expression.

These discriminatory security fees don’t just threaten Pride Festival—they directly harm the lifesaving work Naples Pride does every day.

“Every dollar diverted to pay for politically motivated censorship is a dollar taken away from LGBTQ+ people in need. We provide free mental health counseling, support groups, health services, homelessness prevention, emergency funds, and more. These are critical, lifesaving services that go directly to the people in our community who need them most. The City should be helping us provide these services—not making it harder to reach the people who depend on them.” *Cori Craciun, Executive Director, Naples Pride*

This Affects Everyone

What’s happening in Naples is part of a broader movement to silence marginalized voices under the guise of “public safety” or “decency.” But when those in power pick and choose whose expression is protected, democracy is at risk. Naples Pride won’t stand for it.