

**A UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA  
FORT MYERS DIVISION**

NAPLES PRIDE,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 2:25-cv-00291

v.

CITY OF NAPLES, *et al.*,

Defendants.

\_\_\_\_\_ /

**DECLARATION OF CORI CRACIUN**

I, Cornelia “Cori” Craciun, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, declare as follows:

1. I submit this declaration in support of Naples Pride’s motion for a preliminary injunction against Defendants the City of Naples; the Naples City Council; each member of the City Council (Teresa Heitmann, Terry Hutchison, Raymond Christman, Beth Petrunoff, Bill Kramer, Linda Penniman, and Berne Barton); the Naples Police Department; and the Naples Chief of Police, Ciro Dominguez (collectively, “Defendants”).

2. I am fully familiar with and have personal knowledge of the facts discussed in this declaration.

3. I am the Executive Director of Naples Pride. I have served in that role since 2023, and prior to that I was President of the Naples Pride Board of Directors. I helped start Naples Pride in 2017.

4. As Executive Director, I oversee all of Naples Pride's work, including the planning and organization of Pridefest, our annual Pride Festival (discussed more below). Since the first Pridefest in 2017, I have personally worked on Naples Pride's permit applications from start to finish for that event, including attending all City Council meetings regarding Pridefest's permits (discussed more below).

**Naples Pride**

5. Naples Pride is a Florida nonprofit corporation headquartered in Naples, Florida. Naples Pride is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

6. Naples Pride advocates for, and provides social services to, the greater Naples LGBTQ+ community. Those services including counseling and support groups, housing and legal assistance, and healthcare (e.g., STI/HIV/Hepatitis B&C screening and medication support). Naples Pride also organizes regular social and professional events.

7. Naples Pride is a small organization. It has an annual budget of around \$250,000. I am the only full-time staff member at Naples Pride. Otherwise, Naples Pride is volunteer led. Naples Pride has a Board of Directors, which is comprised of me and ten volunteers.

**Pridefest**

8. Naples Pride hosts an annual event called Pridefest, which is an LGBTQ+ Pride festival that encourages greater Naples LGBTQ+ residents to live openly and express themselves without fear.

9. In addition to sending that message of living openly and self-expression without fear, Pridefest also serves as Naples Pride's largest fundraiser. All proceeds from Pridefest help Naples Pride carry out its mission.

10. I helped start Pridefest in 2017. The event has taken place every summer since then—typically in June, which is known as LGBTQ+ Pride Month—except in 2020 and 2021, when the event did not take place because of COVID-19 restrictions. Every Pridefest has taken place in Cambier Park, which is a large park in the heart of Naples and the city's premier public event space.

11. Pridefest lasts for five hours on one day. While the event requires significant planning and day-of work (by me and other volunteers), it runs very smoothly. Pridefest has only ever requested minimal street closures: in previous years, we have sought to close one block of South 8<sup>th</sup> Street so that Pridefest attendees could safely cross the street into Cambier Park. Over the years, the Naples Police Department, members of the Naples Parks and Recreation Department, the City Manager, and members of the City Council have all told me how well-organized and well-run Pridefest is.

12. Since 2017, there has only been one arrest related to Pridefest: in 2022, an outside protester, unaffiliated with Pridefest or with Naples Pride, was arrested for

disorderly conduct. Aside from that instance, I am not aware of any other security or public safety incidents at any previous Pridefest.

13. Pridefest's main event and main draw is a family-friendly drag performance. The drag performance has taken place every year since Pridefest began, albeit with different restrictions (as I discuss below). The performance consists of multiple drag performers and usually lasts about two-and-a-half hours.

14. For the Pridefest drag performance, Naples Pride typically hires drag performers from Southwest Florida, and also seeks to hire top-tier performers from outside of Southwest Florida who have regional, national or even global renown. For example, in 2019, we hired Eureka O'Hara to perform. And in 2022, we hired Morgan McMichaels to perform. These high-caliber performers contribute additional prestige and talent, which helps increase attendance at the drag performance and at Pridefest more broadly. Additionally, these performers bring different perspectives on drag performance to Pridefest, thereby contributing to and impacting the performance's artistic content. But Naples Pride's ability to hire these notable performers hinges on its ability to hold the drag performance outside, with a large audience—rather than indoors, with a tiny one.

15. Naples Pride and I take the family-friendly nature of the drag performance very seriously. Pridefest attendees are all-ages, so Naples Pride's volunteers and I work to ensure that the drag performance is appropriate for all these attendees. That means we prohibit any nudity, or vulgar, sexual, or obscene content in any of the drag performances. Naples Pride makes this requirement clear to

performers when they are booked, reminds them of it before the performance, and ensures that performers adhere to these rules throughout Pridefest.

16. The Pridefest drag performance took place outside on the mainstage at Cambier Park in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2022.

17. Holding the drag performance outside is significant to Naples Pride because of its symbolic and expressive importance. Naples Pride's mission is helping the Naples LGBTQ+ community to live openly and without fear, which is also the intended expressive message of Pridefest and Pridefest's drag performance. When the drag performance takes place outdoors, on a public stage in the heart of Naples, it contributes to and underscores that expressive message. By contrast, when the performance is forced to take place indoors and out of public sight—as if it were something lewd and vulgar, when it is not—that contradicts and undermines the expressive message of Pridefest and the drag performance.

18. Holding the drag performance outside is also significant to Naples Pride because the drag performance is the main draw for attendees at Pridefest, and it means that as many as 5,000 people can attend the performance all together. As I discuss further below, the number of people that can attend the drag performance has a direct impact on Pridefest's fundraising numbers.

**2023 and 2024 Pridefest**

19. In 2023 and 2024, Naples Pride was unable to hold the Pridefest drag performance outside because the City Council made it clear to us that it would deny the Pridefest permit application altogether or cancel Pridefest if Naples Pride applied

to use the Cambier Park mainstage for Pridefest's drag performance and/or if Naples Pride allowed minors to attend the drag performance.

20. In 2023, in preparation for Pridefest, Naples Pride applied for a permit. In that application, Naples Pride informed the City that it planned to hold the drag performance outdoors.

21. I personally prepared the 2023 permit application, after discussion with Naples Pride's Board.

22. At a March 1, 2023 City Council meeting, the Council initially voted 5-2 to approve Naples Pride's application for the 2023 Pridefest. However, after that vote, there was a massive backlash to Naples Pride's plans to hold the drag performance outdoors, which exerted immense pressure on the City Council to restrict our permit.

23. After the vote, City Council member Petrunoff, Lieutenant O'Reilly, and the City Manager scheduled a conference call with Naples Pride, during which they explained that because of increased opposition to the drag show, Naples Pride had to move the drag show indoors, or else they would cancel Pridefest altogether.

24. Lieutenant O'Reilly stated that, in light of increased public opposition to drag, Defendants were concerned about attacks by outside agitators, and did not want another "Charlottesville" or "Orlando Pulse Nightclub" incident.

25. The Board of Directors of Naples Pride initially rejected the demand to move the drag performance indoors as initially approved by the City Council. They did so because they felt (and still feel) that moving the performance indoors would

alter and undermine its expressive message of pride and openness, as it would symbolize being forced back “into the closet.” However, I urged the Board to relent to the City Council’s demands; if we wanted Pridefest to take place at all, we had to modify our permit application, or risk that the event permit be denied altogether. After deliberation, the Board reluctantly agreed with me, and Naples Pride modified its 2023 Pridefest plans to hold the drag performance indoors.

26. At the March 22, 2023 City Council meeting, I informed the City Council of Naples Pride’s modified plans to hold the drag performance indoors.

27. As a result, the 2023 Pridefest drag performance took place in the small, 200-seat Norris Center, which is next to Cambier Park, and could only be attended by adults.

28. In 2024, Naples Pride again hosted Pridefest’s drag performance indoors—both because it understood that Defendants would only approve its permit application under that condition, and because it was uncertain whether Florida’s statewide law targeting drag performances would be in effect. The 2024 drag performance took place at the Naples Woman’s Club, which holds 180 people.

29. Forcing the drag performance inside in 2023 and 2024 undermined Naples Pride’s desired expressive message, sharply limited attendance, and resulted in decreased revenue for Naples Pride.

30. While approximately 5,000 people attended Pridefest and the drag performance in 2022 (when the performance was outside), only 2,400 people attended Pridefest in 2024, and only 200 people attended the drag performance in 2024—even

though Naples Pride ran the performance multiple times in an attempt to maximize attendance. Naples Pride's fundraising numbers fell from approximately \$63,000 in 2022 to \$46,500 in 2024, even though it doubled the entrance fare from \$5 to \$10.

31. Attendees also complained to me about the impact of holding the drag performance indoors on their Pridefest experience. They noted that it was inconvenient or impossible for them to see the show, especially for parents who could neither bring their children with them to the drag performance nor leave them unattended at a public park while they attended the performance themselves. Other attendees mentioned they could not attend the performance with their friends or siblings. As a result, many attendees skipped the drag performance altogether.

32. We expect the same effects on the 2025 Pridefest if the drag performance is hidden away indoors, and the audience is restricted.

### **2025 Pridefest**

33. This year's Pridefest is scheduled for June 7, 2025. The theme, "Hate Has No Home Here," is intended to send a powerful message of acceptance, and that LGBTQ+ people in Naples need not live in fear of who they are.

34. We have been planning the event for months now, starting just after last year's Pridefest ended. But one aspect of 2025 Pridefest remains unresolved: the location of the drag performance.

35. As in previous years, the 2025 festival will occur in Cambier Park and will feature live performances and a "kids' zone" with various activities for children like face painting, games, and a ball pit. But this year, encouraged by this Court's

decision preliminarily enjoining Florida's anti-drag law, Naples Pride decided to return its family-friendly drag performance to the mainstage of Cambier Park and to reopen it to all ages.

36. Returning the drag performance to the mainstage is important for Naples Pride's expression, including through the drag performance. We want to send the message that the LGBTQ+ community in greater Naples should be able to live in the open and without fear, not hidden away indoors and restricted from view.

37. Attached to my declaration as Exhibit 1 is a true and correct copy of Naples Pride's 2025 Pridefest permit application, which I personally prepared. In the application, Naples Pride noted that it planned to hold the drag performance outside on the Cambier Park mainstage.

38. In November and December 2024, City staff, including the Director of the Parks Department and the City Manager, explained to me through email and phone communications that Naples Pride's permit application would not be approved at all if we sought to hold the drag show outdoors, and that it would be approved only if the show were held indoors.

39. I shared these emails with Naples Pride's Board of Directors and discussed the phone conversations with them.

40. In a December 2024 meeting, Chad Merritt, Director of the Naples Parks Department, said that the City Council would probably impose an "indoors only" condition on the permit regardless of what Naples Pride put in its permit application,

and pointed to the Special Events Manual as authority for the City Council to impose any conditions it sees fit.

41. The City Council ultimately voted 5-2 to issue a permit for the 2025 Pridefest, but *only* on the conditions that the drag performance take place indoors at the Norris Center and that no one under eighteen be admitted to the drag performance portion of Pridefest. The only rationale Defendants ever provided for the age restriction was that protests would be less likely, or less severe, if minors were not allowed to attend the drag performance.

42. As in previous years, moving the performance inside and imposing an 18+ age restriction would undermine the performance's expressive message, severely limit the number of people to whom Naples Pride can communicate that expressive message, and decimate Naples Pride's chief source of fundraising.

43. This year's process for the Pridefest permit has posed an additional challenge: security fees. At the recommendation of the Naples Police Department, Defendants sought to charge Naples Pride \$30,697.50 in security fees for an indoor drag performance and \$44,160 for an outdoor drag performance (assuming that an outdoor performance were approved by the City Council).

44. Attached to my declaration as Exhibit 2 is a true and correct copy of the Police Department's security fee estimates for 2025.

45. These fees represent a sharp increase from the fees we were previously charged for the same event: \$3,867 in 2022 (with an outdoor performance), \$5,313.75

in 2023 (with an indoor performance), and \$15,520 in 2024 (with an indoor performance).

46. Attached to my declaration as Exhibit 3 are true and correct copies of security fee invoices for Pridefest from previous years.

47. These 2025 fees are also much higher than what the City charges other public events that are larger and more disruptive, and to what other cities charge for comparable Pride events with outdoor drag performances.

48. For example, Naples' annual car show closes many streets and fills them with luxury vehicles at a high risk of property damage, but the event was charged only \$16,276.25 in security fees in 2024. Naples' Fifth Avenue Tree Lighting attracts 10,000 to 15,000 people and requires major street closures, but for 2024, its organizers paid only \$18,000 in security fees. Defendants charged Naples Art Institute's New Years Art Festival, a multi-day event with approximately 20,000 attendees, just \$12,970 in 2024. Meanwhile, Cape Coral, Florida—about an hour from Naples—charged just \$7,682.59 in security fees for its 2024 two-day pride festival, which had more than 3,000 attendees and featured an outdoor drag performance.

49. I repeatedly asked the Naples Police Department and other City staff to justify this sudden and enormous increase in security fees. Over email, Defendants made clear that Naples Pride was being charged more because Defendants viewed our event as controversial and likely to attract opposition from anti-drag and anti-LGBTQ+ protesters.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on: April 12, 2025  
Naples, Florida

  
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Cornea(Corin) Craciun