

Minister Gordon Lyons  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Stormont  
Belfast BT4 3XX

6 August 2025

By email

Dear Minister Lyons

## **EastSide Partnership Drag Queen StoryTime**

### **An Open Letter**

I am writing to you from Equity, the performing arts and entertainment trade union representing 50,000 members working as actors, comedians, dancers, singers, drag artists, and more. On Friday last week, protests took place at Holywood Arches Library, during EastSide Partnership's drag artist storytelling event.

As a result of this, two people had to be escorted from the building by the police, and the event organisers worked with local authorities "to manage a safe exit" for attending families, staff and artists. This should not have been necessary – performers have a right to safety when doing their job in their workplace, as do other workers and audiences in attendance. We hope you will join us in reiterating this point and working to prevent further threats to safety.

Furthermore, when commenting on the storytelling event itself, you said that it was "not appropriate for children" and "should not have taken place". Furthermore, you said it "compromised the perception of our public libraries as a welcoming and inclusive space for all as set out in the Libraries NI policy".

This follows a letter of expectation you wrote on 5 February 2025 to the Chair of the Arts Council NI in which you say: "To ensure maximum accessibility and inclusion, I expect the Council in the terms and conditions of its funding programmes to ensure that any activity disrespectful of any tradition, in locations or by groups receiving Council funding, results in specific and substantive action as regards funding."

Drag queen storytelling is more than just a celebration of diversity—it's a continuation of one of the oldest and most cherished traditions in our culture: storytelling. Drag artists' work draws from centuries of performance art, from Shakespearean cross-dressing roles to pantomime dames and has itself spawned a tradition and culture which is deserving of protection. This work celebrates the principles of accessibility and inclusion, demonstrating tolerance, joy and creative expression for all.

These events don't, as you say, "compromise" libraries. In fact, they reinforce libraries as being welcoming and inclusive spaces, by making them more accessible to communities who may have historically felt excluded. The tradition of drag artists and the culture they represent are deserving of respect, as are the audiences who choose not only to appreciate this work, but to celebrate the diversity of our communities.

We hope you agree that artists are not only entitled to expect safety and security whilst at work - but also have a right to work without interference. We would be glad to meet with you to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,



Alice Adams Lemon

National Official, Northern Ireland

Equity

*To all artists: good work, to all workers: good art, to all people: Equity*

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**Equity**  
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