

“Protecting Children: A Study of ‘Drag Bans’ and Gun Laws”

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Introduction

In the 2023 legislative sessions, many conservative-leaning state legislatures began to introduce and pass laws that were direct attacks at the LGBTQIA+ community. More specifically, these bills were aimed at blocking drag performers from having shows that are in the presence of minors. The justification for these laws was in the name of protecting children. Throughout recent years, there has been an incline in gun violence death against children. With gun violence being the number one cause of death for minors, if the justification for protecting children is true, they will also support regulations and bills that are aimed at stopping these murders. A literature review of both information about the history of LGBTQIA+ movements and backlash from certain parts of the country, as well as the history of drag for the community will set the scene on how these drag ban laws are not very different from laws being passed historically. Information will highlight the level of gun violence deaths in minors, as well as information relating to school shootings, will show how big the problem of gun violence in minors has become. In addition to this, gun laws that would alleviate the issue of gun violence will show the ways that legislators can actually use their job to protect children. There will then be independent research that will be able to show not only the percentages of gun laws each of the legislators are sponsoring, but also a number will be calculated to show whether or not the gun laws they are sponsoring would be positive or negative on the safety of children. Each of the gun laws will then be looked at in order to see what it would accomplish, as well as being able to give it the figure that will help find the value of said laws. After this, the findings are going to show whether or not they are sponsoring a high percentage of gun laws and the value of these gun laws, which will be compared with the “common sense” legislation that are supported by a

majority of Americans. This is going to give a full view of whether or not they are sponsoring gun laws that would alleviate the biggest threat to today's youth.

Literature Review on LGBTQIA+ Community, Attacks Against this Community and Drag

In recent years, one of the communities that have been able to find major progress in human rights and liberties is the LGBTQIA+ community. With the 5-4 ruling by the Supreme Court in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, gay marriage was legally recognized nationally by the federal government. However, the resurgence of homophobic ideology has quickly picked up traction in conservative movements in recent years. With many different homophobic laws being put into motion this year, this community is under attack for their rights. One of the most common laws being passed are bans to the performances of drag and an attack on the ability for transgender people to be in public as their authentic selves. One of the justifications for these laws being pursued is to protect children, which has historically been used in order to justify laws against members of the LGBTQIA+ community. A review of the literature will show how the narrative to protect children has been used in order to prevent gay teachers from working in schools and justify why same-sex marriages should not get equal protection as other marriages, as well as showing how drag has historically been an art form by and for the LGBTQIA+ community.

In a journal article titled "'Gay Teachers Fight Back?' Rank-and-File Gay and Lesbian Teachers' Activism against the Briggs Initiative, 1977-1978" by Sara Smith-Silverman details how LGBTQIA+ teachers fought back against the California government. Proposition 6, also known as the Briggs Initiative, was a "California ballot [initiative]" that would have "barred gay, lesbians, and advocates of gay rights" from employment within California's public schools (Smith-Silverman 79). This example is one of many laws and initiatives that have been

introduced throughout the years to discriminate against gay and lesbian people in the name of protecting children. Proposition 6 came about in large part due to the advocacy of Anita Bryant against a 1977 Dade County ordinance, which stated that residents were protected against “discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations” (Smith-Silverman 88). In order to gain signatures to repeal the ordinance, Bryant formed the group known as “Save Our Children” (Smith-Silverman 88). Bryant then largely advocated for the removal of LGBTQ teachers, as she ““must protect [her] children from their evil influence”” (Smith-Silverman 88). This goes into the larger narrative that gay and lesbian people are a danger to children and it is the government’s job to protect children from these individuals. By introducing an advocacy group titled “Save Our Children,” as well as her comments against the LGBTQ being around her children, Bryant’s actions laid out the perfect ideological platform for the Briggs Initiative to take flight. Proposition 6 eventually did not pass, however, there was strong support for it in the early days of the initiative. Months before the date of the ballot initiative, there was an astounding 61% of people who supported it, with only around 31% of the people voting to oppose the proposition (Smith-Silverman 80). This overwhelming support for this made it seem very likely that many LGBTQ citizens and supporters of the community would not be able to work within the California public school system. The ballot was eventually defeated with a vote of “59[%] percent voting no and 41[%] percent voting yes” (Smith-Silverman 80). This was due in no small part to activism by the LGBTQ community and grassroots organization against the proposition (Smith-Silverman 80). While the initiative was eventually shut down, the impacts of both Bryant’s advocacy and the Briggs Initiative still shine through today. One of the many justifications for discrimination against the LGBTQ community is in the name of protecting

children, which has continued a decades long cycle of statutes perpetuated toward the LGBTQ community in order for children to “be safe.”

In her book titled “Vulnerability Politics: The Uses and Abuses of Precarity in Political Debate,” author Katie Oliviero discusses how different identities have been subject to political struggles in order to protect the American ideal of the “family” and morality within the American population. Chapter Three titled “Vulnerable Families: Morality and Race in Same-Sex Marriage Opposition” goes into more detail about how the right to get married for LGBTQ citizens has consistently been a fight to protect the traditional family values, thus protecting children from this as well. The author discusses the fight for Proposition 8, which was another ballot initiative in California that would ban same-sex marriages (Oliviero 108). This measure was due to the fight by conservative groups that argued recognizing same-sex partnerships as marriage would “threaten... ‘traditional’ matrimony and families” (Oliviero 108). This attack against the LGBTQ community is due to the fact that there is a historical meaning behind marriage and how this has been seen by society. The author details how the simple understanding that comes with heterosexual marriages goes hand in hand with the “commonsense, moral understandings such as the need to protect vulnerable children” (Oliviero 126). Due to the history of our nation, heterosexual marriages have always been deemed acceptable and have not been viewed as morally deviant and a harm to children. However, same-sex marriages have suffered from this, being denied a majority of the time in the name of protecting tradition and children. Supporters of Proposition 8 even went as far as to believe that LGBTQ citizens were not as well equipped to have and raise their own children. The author discusses how “responsible parenting” has been the product of “heterosexuality and matrimony, rather than people” (Oliviero 116). Not only did people use to right to protect children as

reasoning for not wanting to allow same-sex marriage, but they also believe that good citizens and people were due to heteronormative culture and not the individual person who was responsible for raising them. By painting the narrative that children need to be protected and only be exposed to heterosexuality, this proposition and the language around it only perpetuates the stigma that LGBTQ citizens are dangerous to society.

The right to work in schools was not only occurring in California in the 70's, as many other states were introducing similar initiatives and statutes to Proposition 6. In an article titled "LGBTQ Teachers Await Decision on Discrimination Protections" by Madeline Will, Will discusses how teachers today are still struggling with protections in the workplace and details other historical instances in which states tried to bar LGBTQ citizens from serving in education. The article starts by discussing Shanna Peeples, a veteran teacher and Teacher of the Year award winner, who was not able to continue in education due to her identity as a homosexual woman (Will 1). This was one of the many examples of LGBTQ people not being able to serve in their positions in education properly, as they were not allotted the same protections as their counterparts. This led to many waiting to hear the result of *Bostock v. Clayton County*, a Supreme Court case focusing on if federal protections in workplace discrimination extended to LGBTQ workers (Will 1). The necessity of this ruling is due to the fact that many states do not have official anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ citizens. The author also goes into historical detail about other places where gay and lesbian people were being discriminated against in the name of protecting children and school. The author briefly discusses the Florida teacher purge, which was an event in the 50's and 60's which involved an "investigation committee that tried... to weed out gay and lesbian teachers and professors" (Will 1). There were also state laws that were passed in order to prevent gay teachers from working. In Oklahoma, a law stated that

schools had the authority to “fire teachers who engaged in ‘public homosexual activity’,” as well as supporters of the community (Will 2). While Proposition 6 was not able to pass the ballot, this Oklahoma law was passed through the legislature and was in effect for a time. This shows the power of rhetoric in legislation, as gay people were now legally barred from teaching in this state because they were seen as a danger to children and it is the government responsibility to protect its vulnerable citizens.

Finally, drag has been an art form that has historically been dominated by members of the LGBTQ community. Author Bruce Drushel wrote about the history of drag and how it became a prominent art form within the gay community in his article “Performing Race, Class, and Gender: The Tangled History of Drag.” The author goes into the roots of drag before showing how it is so closely related to the LGBTQ community. Drag is so intertwined within gay and lesbian culture due to the fact that it is one way to express “sexual uncertainty” and destigmatize many of the issues facing the community (Drushel 8). Not only did drag have much better representation for members of the LGBTQ community, but drag and drag artists were influential in many of the major protests that helped secure rights. While drag queens were highly important in protests in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, the Stonewall riots in New York proved to be the most powerful of these demonstrations (Drushel 23). Known as the catalyst to the modern gay rights movement, the Stonewall riots were another way of highlighting the importance of drag in the community. Not only did the gay rights movement pick up drastic momentum in the aftermath of Stonewall, but so did drag. The author mentions how drag was able to have “a proliferation in new gay clubs” in the time following the riots (Drushel 23). This continued into modern times in which drag is a very pinnacle part of the LGBTQ community and a major art form for people within the community. Due to its involvement with the gay and

lesbian community, drag is now being attacked in the name of protecting children from sexual deviance and promoting tradition.

Gun Laws, Their Effect on the Safety of Minors, and Data on Gun Violence Against Minors

Over the years, gun violence has become a prevailing cause of death for children. In the most recent data, it is actually shown to have surpassed another other cause of death in children. Not only is this due to unintentional shootings due to poor management and safety protocols, but also due to homicide and greater access to firearms. In the aftermath of Columbine, which is one of the first and most deadly school shootings to occur in American history, there has been a drastic increase in both the amount and the deadliness of school shootings. In order to address the issue of gun violence death, more common sense regulations and laws need to be implemented in order to help more children reach adulthood without the fear of death by firearms.

Statistics on Gun Violence Deaths in Minors

The amount of deaths in children due to gun violence has risen staggeringly over the past decade. While there are many other causes of death within minors, such as motor vehicle accidents and illness, gun violence has now risen to the number one spot on the list. A study done by the American Academy of Pediatrics shows the levels of gun violence in minors and how these trends have increased over the years. The total number of gun violence deaths has continued to increase from 3342 per 100,000 persons in 2018 to 4752 per 100,000 persons in the year of 2021 (Roberts, et al., 3). The data also goes into specifics of the kind of gun violence deaths and how they have changed. In 2018, 1831 of the total firearm deaths of minors was homicide (Roberts, et al., 3). However, 2021 saw that 3057 of their total deaths were the result of

a homicide (Roberts, et al., 3). In 4 years time, the percentage of homicide deaths in children rose from about 55% to a staggering 64%. Not only did the total number of gun violence deaths rise in recent years, but there is also an increase in the amount of homicide deaths at the hands of firearms. Additionally, the New England Journal of Medicine published a study that compared death by gun violence with other common causes of death in children. When comparing the data, gun violence and motor vehicle accidents have been the highest killers of children (Goldstick, et al., 1955). Historically, motor vehicle accidents held the highest level of death in children, however, gun violence has since surpassed this figure (Goldstick, et al., 1955). There is also data about the increase in types of gun-related deaths between 2019 and 2020. Firearm homicide levels went up 33.4% in this one year, while the rate of suicide deaths only rose 1.1% (Goldstick, et al., 1955). Both of these studies have proven that not only is the rate of gun violence increasing, but also there being an increase in the level of firearm deaths that are the result of homicide. This shows that there is great cause to start implementing different kinds of laws that could address and start lowering these numbers.

School Shootings and Mental Health Effect of Gun Violence

School shootings are one example of a mass shooting that kills many people in a single act of violence. However, the number of instances of school shootings has grown dramatically since the 1970s, as well as the magnitude of these violent acts. According to data published by the K-12 School Shooting Database, the number of school shooting events has grown exponentially over the years, with it sitting at 20 in 1970 and rising to the astronomical level of 344 in 2023 (K-12 School Shooting Database, <https://k12ssdb.org/>). Not only is the total number of school shootings increasing drastically, but there is also an increase in the number of casualties that result from these attacks. In the same database, there is a graph comparing the

total number of deaths in the deadliest school shootings in history. Starting with Columbine (13 deaths), known to be the first of its level, it then highlights Sandy Hook (26), Parkland (17), and Uvalde (21) (K-12 School Shooting Database, <https://k12ssdb.org/>). While the first attack occurred in the 1990's, all of the last three have occurred in the years following 2010. Since the fourth deadliest school shooting on this chart was followed by 10+ years of a lack of a shooting of that caliber, having three of the next deadliest occur in a 14 year span show a clear jump in both the amount and magnitude of school shootings. Not only are school shootings harmful to children in the aspect that they could lose their lives, but there are also catastrophic effects to the mental health of children who experience one of these events. In an article for the New England Journal of Medicine titled "The War-Zone Mentality — Mental Health Effects of Gun Violence in U.S. Children and Adolescents," Dr. James Garbarino describes two different kinds of mental health problems that could arise from gun violence. A simple trauma of just witnessing gun violence can lead to a child developing an "acute stress reaction" that could potentially lead to the children suffering from "post-traumatic stress disorder" (Garbarino 1149). While it is noted that a single instance of traumatic violence is unlikely to cause irreparable damage to a child, the fact that many children also witness many instances of gun violence through the media increases their risk of developing these conditions (Garbarino 1149). In addition to witnessing all types of gun violence through media sources, there is also the issue of children that grow up in areas in which gun violence is a routine aspect of their daily lives. Not only does this make these children most susceptible to developing PTSD, but also influences the child's thinking and causes a "war-zone mentality" (Garbarino 1150). In neighborhoods where gun violence is prevalent, over 60% of elementary-aged children were first-hand witnesses to gun violence, a figure that is comparable to the level of children witnessing political violence in Gaza (Garbarino 1150).

While it makes sense that children experiencing times of war are going to have a large percentage who witness gun violence, there is not a great explanation as to why this phenomenon is also occurring in a country that has not experienced a home-based war in decades. Not only does gun violence in schools affect the safety of children, but school shootings mixed with a constant witnessing of gun violence can have horrible effects on the mental health of minors.

Ways to Alleviate Gun Violence Against Minors

According to a Pew Research Center study, many Americans would like to see many different types of gun law reforms that are considered as “common sense” regulations. The highest percentages came with the idea of reforms for raising the age to purchase a firearm from 18 to 21, banning assault style weapons, and banning magazines that have a high capacity (Pew Research Center,

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/06/28/gun-violence-widely-viewed-as-a-major-and-growing-national-problem/>). The age limit increase was net supported by 79% of respondents, the banning of high-capacity magazines was supported or somewhat supported by 66%, and the banning of assault weapons came with a percentage of 64% supporting a law like this (Pew Research Center,

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/06/28/gun-violence-widely-viewed-as-a-major-and-growing-national-problem/>). These percentages show that a vast majority of Americans support legislation that would be designed in a way to stop certain people from purchasing weapons, as well as banning weapons with a high capacity to kill. In addition, there is information about whether or not the respondents believe that our current gun laws are sufficient. There have been over 50% of respondents stating that the gun laws that are currently governing this area need to be more strict, with the most recent data showing that this ideology is supported by 58% of

respondents (Pew Research Center,

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/06/28/gun-violence-widely-viewed-as-a-major-and-growing-national-problem/>). More of the data shows the percentages of people on their current

view of gun violence. When asked about how big of a threat people think gun violence poses, 60% believe that it is a very big problem while 23% feel that it is a moderately big problem (Pew Research Center,

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/06/28/gun-violence-widely-viewed-as-a-major-and-growing-national-problem/>). In addition, 62% of respondents believe that gun violence is only

going to get worse and become a larger issue for Americans (Pew Research Center,

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/06/28/gun-violence-widely-viewed-as-a-major-and-growing-national-problem/>). A vast majority of people see how big the issue of gun violence is

and could become. Some of the only ways that these issues can be addressed is through

application and implementation of laws that restrict access to firearms and banning certain types

of dangerous weapons. The purpose of this research is to show that the sponsors of drag bans do

not support enough gun laws or the right kind of gun laws that would address the issue that is

plaguing the youth of America: gun violence.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this research is to see if the primary sponsors of different obscenity bills passed across the country, which effectively would ban the practice of drag art in spaces where minors are present, are ideologically consistent in their sponsorship patterns in efforts to protect children. The sample states of Tennessee, Florida, and Montana were used in order to find whether or not the sponsors of drag bans are sponsoring or co-sponsoring laws that would actually be to protect children, such as limits on firearms or more regulations of their sale, etc.

For Tennessee, Chris Todd, who is the primary sponsor of HB009, and Jack Johnson, primary sponsor of SB003, are the legislators being studied. In Florida, Randy Fine, sponsor of HB1423, and Clay Yarborough, sponsor of SB1438, will provide the data for their legislature. Finally, Montana's Braxton Mitchell, primary sponsor of HB359, will finish out the required data. So that the data could be numerical, all bills that relate to guns are added. Any sponsor who has not had more than 40 bills sponsored in the latest legislative session will have their co-sponsorships added in to have more data available. After finding the number of gun laws sponsored, a percentage will be found that will show the amount of gun laws that each is sponsoring out of their total number of bills. The first figure that is found is the percentage of laws that each of the legislators that sponsored drag bans. The percentages will be compared with each other and show how much each of the sponsors is prioritizing gun violence and legislation related to this problem. Additionally, all of the laws that are actively harming children, such as lowering the age limit, will be given a value of -1. If the law is helping children, such as more restrictions on the access and use of firearms, it will be given a value of +1. If the law is neutral, like a bill about the economic side of firearm sales or unspecified code updates, it was given a value of 0. These values will then be averaged with the total number of gun bills of each sponsor. If the value falls equal to below 0, not only is the legislator not addressing gun violence enough, but the bills they are sponsoring in this area are harmful to children or do not address the actual issues of gun violence deaths in minors. All of the data regarding the bill information, sponsor information, and the other legislation they sponsored was found from the Tennessee General

Assembly website¹, the Florida House of Representatives² and Florida Senate³ websites, and the Montana Legislature⁴ website.

Content Analysis of Sponsorships and Bills

Tennessee: HB0009

During the beginning of this legislative term, state representative Chris Todd introduced one of the first “drag bans” in the country. This bill aimed to make it illegal to have “adult cabaret performances” in any public places that could be seen by a child (Tennessee General Assembly, <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Bill/HB0009.pdf>). In discussing the bill’s definition of what these performances entail, examples such as “topless dancers,” “strippers,” and “male or female impersonators” are included (Tennessee General Assembly, <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Bill/HB0009.pdf>). The “male or female impersonators” language is the part of the bill that is aimed at preventing not only the performance of drag, but the very existence of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals.

In researching the other bills that Representative Todd sponsored during the 2023 legislative session, a total number of 45 bills were included in which he was the primary sponsor. Because this is above the threshold of 40 bills, only his primary sponsorships are included in the data. Only 8 of these bills related to gun laws in general, making his total percentage to be 17.778%.

Additionally, in the 8 bills that he did sponsor that correlate to firearms, 5 of the bills have a value of -1, 2 of the bills have a value of 1, and 1 one the bills has a value of 0. The first negative bill is HB1158. This bill would lower the age requirement for a concealed weapon

¹ <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/>

² <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/>

³ <https://www.flsenate.gov/session>

⁴ <https://leg.mt.gov/>

permit from 21 to the age of 18 (Tennessee House of Representatives, <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Bill/HB1158.pdf>). This would not only allow for there to be more guns available, but more people would be able to carry them without the knowledge of the individuals around them. HB1159 would extend the time to file a petition after “final determination of suspension or revocation” of gun ownership from 30 days to 45 days (Tennessee House of Representatives, <https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default.aspx?BillNumber=HB1159&ga=113>). This means that people who have committed some kind of act in order to have their gun taken away from them would be able to have more time in order to make a plea for them to have ownership again. An interesting one is HB1161, which would make any person or business that does not allow guns in their property to “not [be] immune from civil liability” for the act of not allowing guns (Tennessee House of Representatives, <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Bill/HB1161.pdf>). This means that anyone who does not allow firearms at their business or property could be sued in a civil trial for their lack of allowing firearms. The final two negative gun laws go hand-in-hand: HB2283 and HB7064. The former would allow any officers of the law, active duty or veterans, or people with “enhanced handgun carry permit[s]” to be able to either openly or conceal carry a firearm in a Pre-K-12 institution (Tennessee House of Representatives, <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Bill/HB2883.pdf>). The latter expands on the first bill and adds “any other property while in use by any public board of education, school, college, or university” in places where this specified group of people is able to carry weapons (Tennessee House of Representatives, <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Bill/HB7064.pdf>). The neutral gun bill is an expansion of the Tennessee Firearms Freedom Act. All HB2885 would do is add “bipods” under “grips” in the

list of accessories (Tennessee House of Representatives, <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Bill/HB2885.pdf>). Since this is not either a regulation or a change that would increase the likelihood of gun violence, it is considered neutral in this research. The two bills that would have a positive impact on children's safety are HB2881 and HB2884. The first bill involves make it a Class E felony for anyone to "conceal, store, barter, sell, transfer, or dispose" of a weapon that has had its original serial number either removed or damaged in some way that it has become an untraceable weapon (Tennessee House of Representatives, <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Bill/HB2881.pdf>). This is beneficial because it could aid in preventing black market or unprohibited sales and distributions of firearms. Finally, HB2884 would require that the Department of Safety provide information to the House about the number of safety courses that have provided or the number that they expect to provide to individuals (Tennessee House of Representatives, <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Bill/HB2884.pdf>). By providing data about safety courses, it could make the legislature more likely to provide funding in order to achieve more programs designated towards safe gun ownership and usage. With a total of -3 when all of the bills are tallied, Representative Todd's numerical value would be -0.375 after it is taken out of his 8 total gun bills. This falls below 0, so the gun bills that he is sponsoring are more likely to cause harm to children than to protect them.

Tennessee: SB003

Senator Jack Johnson was the primary sponsor of the senate's version of the drag ban. The language of the bill is used for both HB009 and SB003. During the 113th General Assembly, Senator Johnson sponsored an impressive 156 bills, so only his sponsorships were taken into

account in the data. However, only one of these bills pertained to firearms. This puts his gun law sponsorship percentage at 0.641%.

The bill that did pertain to gun regulations was SB7085. This bill would require the Tennessee Department of Safety to provide “free firearm locks” upon the request of a Tennessee resident (Tennessee General Assembly, <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Bill/SB7085.pdf>). The bill would also require that the Department of Safety to be in collaboration with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) in order to “create a public safety campaign” on the proper way to safely store firearms (Tennessee General Assembly, <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Bill/SB7085.pdf>). Seeing as this law would help keep guns in safe locations, away from the access of children or unauthorized users, Senator Johnson has a numerical value of 1 in terms of whether or not his gun bills are beneficial to children.

While the gun bills that he did sponsor were positive in the fact that they would make safer homes and less likely to cause accidental shootings if a child got their hands on the firearm, his low percentage of bills shows that he is not sponsoring enough gun laws to justify the protecting children argument.

Florida: HB1423

Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee⁵ Randy Fine was responsible for sponsoring Florida’s HB1423, which was categorized as a protection of children bill. This bill used language that would effectively ban establishments from gaining licenses required to operate, could revoke licenses for any establishment that “admits child[ren] into an adult live performance,” and would prohibit any person from allowing a child into these types of live performances (Florida House of Representatives, <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Bills/billsdetail.aspx?BillId=78267>). With the vague

⁵<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4646>

language of this bill, it was used in order to prohibit any type of restaurant or place of public accommodation from allowing children to be in the presence of drag shows. It also adds that a violation of this bill would cause “immediate serious danger to public health, safety, or welfare” (Florida House of Representatives,

<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Bills/billsdetail.aspx?BillId=78267>). The strong language of the bill was used in order to cause fear in not only businesses that would host events that involved drag performers, but also made drag performers wary of their ability to perform.

In the 2023 Regular Session, Representative Fine only sponsored 11 other bills. Due to this falling below the 40 bill requirement, his 13 co-sponsorships were also looked at to obtain his data. Of the 24 total bills that he had some sort of sponsorship in, only 2 of them were related to gun legislation. This would make his total gun bill sponsorship percentage to be 8.333%.

In looking at the two gun-related bills that he sponsored, both of the bills are negative and would both get a value of -1. HB221 as it involves prohibiting businesses from assigning “merchant codes” or prohibiting a payment card company from requiring a merchant to provide these codes (Florida House of Representatives,

<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Bills/billsdetail.aspx?BillId=76943>). Due to the nature of trying to hide gun purchases, it would negatively affect children due to a lack of people being able to track the purchases of firearms. HB1543, would have a damaging effect on this aspect. It was given a -1 due to the fact that it would reduce the minimum age required in order to purchase a firearm, as well as lowering the “age of purchasers to which specific licensees are prohibited from selling or transferring firearm[s]” (Florida House of Representatives, <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Bills/billsdetail.aspx?BillId=78399>). It has been proven that not only does lowering the age at which people can purchase a firearm make it more

likely that an accidental shooting could occur or the gun could end up in the wrong hands, but that more guns being purchased and used is likely to cause more deaths due to firearms. When averaging these two values, his numerical representation is -0.5. Seeing as this falls below the 0 numerical threshold, he is negatively impacting children's safety with his few firearm bill sponsorships.

Florida: SB1438

State Senator Clay Yarborough was the primary sponsor for the companion bill to HB1423: SB1438. It uses similar language of the corresponding House bill, such as revoking licenses for establishments that allow children into adult live performances, prohibiting the issuing of permits, and prohibiting a person from knowingly allowing a child into an adult live performance (Florida Senate, <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/1438>). However, Yarborough adds some more applicable punishments if this were to occur. Not only does this bill give the Department of Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco specific authorization to revoke licenses if they find that an establishment is not complying, it also adds in "providing criminal penalties" (Florida Senate, <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/1438>). While it is very similar to the House bill, the addition of criminal charges make this bill much more dangerous. Not only is it prohibited and businesses could lose their license and operation, but owners, performers, and other individuals involved could face criminal charges for allowing minors to be in the presence of drag shows.

When looking at the other bills Senator Yarborough sponsored during the 2023 Regular Session, he only was the primary sponsor of 26 bills. Seeing as this falls below 40, his 5 co-sponsorships were also added to the data. Of his total sponsorships of 31 bills, he sponsored 0 bills that related to firearms and gun violence. Not only does this put his percentage at 0%, but

his numerical value would also be 0. With such strong language in his bill to elect to prosecute people in the name of protecting children, there is no reason that he should not be looking into the biggest threat to children today.

Montana: HB359

The last representative that will be added to this data is Montana's Braxton Mitchell. HB359 is one of the more extensive drag bans, as it provides many definitions into the terms of what should be prohibited. It begins like many of the other bills by "prohibiting minors [from] attending sexually oriented shows," but it also goes on to ban "drag story hour in schools and libraries that receive public funding," and "prohibiting sexually oriented performances on public property where children are present" (Montana Legislature, <https://leg.mt.gov/bills/2023/billpdf/HB0359.pdf>). In addition to adding more prohibitions to his version of the drag ban, he also provides numerous definitions that add to what should be prohibited. He provides the definition of a drag king, a drag queen, and drag story hour, as well as defining nude to mean "clothed in a manner that leaves uncovered... any portion of the breast below the top of the areola of the breasts" (Montana Legislature, <https://leg.mt.gov/bills/2023/billpdf/HB0359.pdf>). He also adds in a second section in which fines for establishments that break these rules would be required to pay, which range from \$1,000-\$5,000 for the first offense and even goes up to a range of \$2,500 to \$5,000 for a second offense, with the third offense being \$10,000 (Montana Legislature, <https://leg.mt.gov/bills/2023/billpdf/HB0359.pdf>). The third section of the bill provides all of the places in which these performances and story hours are banned, which include a school that receives public funding, a library that receives public funding, any other public location that receives funding from the state, and any public property in the presence of someone less than 18

(Montana Legislature, <https://leg.mt.gov/bills/2023/billpdf/HB0359.pdf>). Due to the extensive nature of his bill, Representative Mitchell would have made it almost impossible for any drag performance to occur in any kind of public place. Additionally, the banning of drag story hour not only harms the ability of free speech on the performer, but also would not allow children to be able to learn and enhance their knowledge.

In the 2023 session, Representative Mitchell was the primary sponsor of only 10 bills. The 36 bills in which he was a requester on were added to make a total of 46 bills in his sponsorship. Only 4 of these bills pertained to firearms, making his percentage 8.696%. After extensively writing about how his drag ban would protect children, there should be more bills addressing firearms and their access. Of these bills, all were just codified in a way that would “generally revise gun laws” (Montana Legislature, <https://leg.mt.gov/legislator-information/roster/individual/7563>). Due to the vague nature of these bills, all of their values would be assigned as 0. This is due to the fact that there is no way of knowing what these bills would have accomplished. By having a 0, he is neutral in his want to protect children from their biggest harm.

Findings

The table below highlights all of the above statistics on the percentage of gun bills each has sponsored, as well as the numerical value of whether or not those laws were damaging to children rather than helping them.

Sponsor Name	Percentage of Gun Bills Sponsorships	Value of Gun Bills
Representative Chris Todd (TN)	17.778%	-0.375
Senator Jack Johnson (TN)	0.641%	1
Representative Randy Fine (FL)	8.333%	-1
Senator Clay Yarborough (FL)	0%	0
Representative Braxton Mitchell (MT)	8.696%	0

As seen in the table, only one of the legislators had above 10% of their legislation relating to firearm bills. Seeing that there are many different laws that would help in alleviating gun violence in youth, there is not enough gun legislation for all of the sponsors to live by the argument that they are protecting children.

Additionally, all but Senator Clay Yarborough have sponsored at least one gun bill during their latest legislative session. Looking at the numerical value of whether or not these bills would actually prevent gun violence deaths in children, only Senator Johnson who would make a positive impact with the bill that he sponsored. All of the other Representatives/Senators either have a neutral stance on preventing gun violence or they have laws that would negatively impact the safety of children.

When comparing the type of legislation that is supported to solve the issue of gun violence, age limit increases and bans on high capacity weapons are among some of the most supported types of legislation. However, many of the legislation that was being sponsored were laws that go against these “common sense” regulations. Two of the laws actively lower age restrictions. However, a majority of Americans believe that the age limit should actually be

raised. By lowering the age level, there are many more people between the ages of 18 and 21 that would be able to buy and trade weapons. Putting more weapons on the street is one of the many ways that gun violence increases. Additionally, bans were highly supported for assault style weapons and high capacity magazines. However, not one of the bills that the legislators sponsored addressed this area.

In addition to not addressing the types of laws that a majority of Americans are in support of, there were also many other laws that were sponsored that would also have a negative effect on children. These include hiding merchant codes, effectively making it harder to track and subpoena for purchased weapons, as well as allowing certain gun permit holders to be able to carry weapons on school properties. Both of these laws would make it much easier for people to commit violent acts with firearms much easier than they otherwise could.

Seeing as the primary application of the drag ban bills has been under the assumption of protecting children, there is not enough legislation to address the real issues plaguing today's youth for this argument to be valid.

Conclusion

The data above shows a very clear pattern that has been going on in many conservative-leaning legislatures: ignoring the problems that are actually causing the most significant harm for children. While laws are being implemented that are said to be "protecting children," there is a lack of evidence that these are anything besides words. Historically, there have been many different movements against the LGBTQIA+ in the name of protecting children. At the same time, drag has been an art form that the community embraced and continues to use as expression. Additionally, the number of gun violence deaths have continued to rise, as well as the percentage of those deaths that are the result of homicide. There are many different kinds of

bills that could address and lower the level of gun violence, which have overwhelming support from the American people. These “common sense” regulations could do major improvements that would further protect children. Two figures were then calculated in order to show both the percentage of gun laws each of the drag ban sponsors introduced, as well as a value that will show the impact of these laws. An analysis was then done in order to highlight these gun laws and what their effect would be. The percentages are compared to see the priority each of the legislators gives to gun laws comparable to each other. Finally, these laws were compared with the “common sense” regulations in order to show if any of the laws being sponsored would address the deaths of children.

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