

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

August 17, 2021

Donald Baer
Chair, PBS Board of Directors
Sent via electronic mail

Dear Mr. Baer,

As an organization dedicated to free expression, and in particular young people's rights to read and learn, the National Coalition Against Censorship was alarmed when it heard that the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) removed a recorded segment from its national website after some member stations objected to its content. In the segment, Little Miss Hot Mess, a member of the global leadership team for Drag Queen Story Hour, read her book *The Hips on the Drag Queen Go Swish, Swish, Swish*.

By removing the segment, PBS made it impossible for individuals across the nation to watch it. As a national public service provider, PBS must not allow one or several of its member stations to dictate what programming all Americans are allowed to access. NCAC calls on PBS to issue an apology to Little Miss Hot Mess and return the recording to their website where all users can be free to watch it—or ignore it.

It is our understanding that Little Miss Hot Mess read her book as part of *Let's Learn*, an educational program produced by WNET/THIRTEEN. The program, aimed at children ages 3-8, is a partnership between WNET and the New York City Department of Education. As each public television station has discretion over the shows it broadcasts, some PBS member stations chose not to air the episode in their markets. Some also objected to it appearing on their websites, which are linked to PBS.org. Since the PBS website structure does not allow local stations to customize what segments appear online, the national PBS team removed Little Miss Hot Mess's program from the national website. WNET/THIRTEEN had to create a work-around to keep the program on their local site.

The decision to privilege the opinions of those who opposed this episode of *Let's Learn* runs counter to PBS's stated mission to "express a diversity of perspectives." The pressure of anti-LGBTQ+ groups in some regions cannot be allowed to determine what content is available to all users of PBS.org and member stations' websites. Although this content may be seen by some as

NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association
AICA-USA
American Association of School Administrators
American Association of University Professors
American Association of University Women
American Booksellers for Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Jewish Committee
American Library Association
American Literary Translators Association
American Society of Journalists & Authors
Americans United for Separation of Church & State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children's Literature Association
College Art Association
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
The Creative Coalition
Directors Guild of America
The Dramatists Guild of America
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund
Educational Book & Media Association
First Amendment Lawyers Association
Free Speech Coalition
Freedom to Read Foundation
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International Literacy Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of the Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Youth Rights Association
The NewsGuild-CWA
PEN America
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Project Censored
SAG-AFTRA
Sexuality Information & Education Council of the U.S.
Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Democratic Intellectuals
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ
Office of Communication
United Methodist Church,
United Methodist Communications
Women's American ORT
Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

controversial, it may also be very important to many people whose local stations choose not to air it. PBS should prioritize making more content available online, not less, to allow individual users to make choices about what they watch, not subject them to the tyranny of local majorities.

In order to build a world where difference is accepted and even celebrated, it is increasingly important to offer content that mirrors the diversity of the viewing public, allowing more people to see themselves in the programming they watch and allowing all people to explore new stories and ideas. However, if LGBTQ+ content continues to be blocked from national reach, producers are increasingly likely to stop producing it.

NCAC urges PBS to publicly apologize to Little Miss Hot Mess and to return the segment to PBS.org immediately. PBS must also stop allowing member stations to veto what programs are accessible to all web viewers because they may be controversial in their local communities.

Warmest regards,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

cc: Paula Kerger
President, Public Broadcasting Service

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