

**Community &  
Legislative Affairs**

# Memo

**To:** Mayor Shyne, Mayor Pro Tempore Erickson, and West Hollywood City Councilmembers

**From:** Moya Márquez, Community Programs Coordinator / LGBTQ+ Advisory Board Liaison

**cc:** David Wilson, City Manager  
Yvonne Quarker, Director of Community Services  
Andi Lovano, Manager of Community & Legislative Affairs  
Jennifer Del Toro, Supervisor of Community & Legislative Affairs

**Date:** 2/1/2023

**Re:** LGBTQ+ Advisory Board's Withdrawal of Support of the Drag Laureate Program

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Dear Mayor Shyne, Mayor Pro Tempore Erickson, and West Hollywood City Councilmembers,

This memo is presented to you per the request of the City's LGBTQ+ Advisory Board.

Following consideration and discussion, the LGBTQ+ Advisory Board at its January 12, 2023 meeting, approved by a 6-1 vote to withdraw its support of the Drag Laureate Program in its current form, which was uploaded to the City's website in Fall 2022, citing pay inequity and other factors – and citing the attached letter from the Chamber of Commerce which summarizes most of the concerns of the Board.

ATTACHMENT: Letter from the West Hollywood Chamber of Commerce Announcing its Withdrawal of Support of the Drag Laureate Program

The West Hollywood Chamber of Commerce stands in solidarity with the City's own LGBTQ+ Advisory Board in voicing our concern regarding fair and equitable compensation for the Drag Laureate Program. Pay inequity for the laureate perpetuates the tokenizing, objectification, and the delegitimization of drag performance as enterprise. So strong is our position on promoting a vibrant, diverse, and inclusive field of small business in West Hollywood, the Chamber advised Mayor Meister and Director of Economic Development, John Leonard, that we would pull our support and involvement for this program unless the pay equity issue was resolved because the Chamber cannot reconcile advocating and coaching the Drag Laureate to recognize themselves as a legitimate business, while the program itself perpetuates an exploitative gaze that benefits from drag performance remaining part of an informal economy, especially of an already marginalized community.

We were heartened when our efforts to renegotiate the stipend from \$5,000 to \$12,500 per year proved successful when, on Sep 29th, Mayor Meister instructed John Leonard to pull the program from the website until the item could be brought back to Council in November because we were excited to be part of this inaugural program that we believed held so much progress. We appreciated Mayor Meister's willingness to hear our concerns and her commitment to fair compensation. We are deeply disappointed that the program remained online, despite the promise to pull it until the compensation increase was resolved and despite four attempts by the Chamber (since Oct 4) to inquire about the fact that it was still up on the City's website.

So now, rather than voicing simple concern, we must voice our outright objection to the program as it is currently written and approved. The Chamber and the West Hollywood Small Business Foundation will not support or participate in the City's Drag

Laureate Program. This means that we will not take part in reviewing applicants or making recommendations on who should be laureate. Furthermore, we will not consent to any Chamber events being used as part of the Drag Laureate's required duties and we request any reference to a partnership with the City be stricken from the program immediately.

While the Chamber is still moving forward with creating the Independent Entertainer Program, as this was always in our scope of work; it just won't be in collaboration with laureate program. If a laureate wishes to join the Chamber, complimentary for the first year, under our new entertainer membership plan, they are welcome to inquire with us directly; however, it must be clearly stated that it will be separate from the official City's Drag Laureate Program.