

DRAG STORY HOUR

Statement

HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan) [6.28 pm]: Comrades and honourable members, I rise this evening to talk about a visit I made to Maylands, a beautiful suburb in the wonderful East Metropolitan Region, on Saturday. I used to live in Maylands, so I know the area quite well. It is a great place to visit. I was prompted to go there after a discussion with some of my colleagues, including Hon Peter Foster. He was telling me that on Saturday morning the City of Bayswater was hosting Drag Story Hour. That meant that a drag performer was going to read to some children. I thought that was great. So what was the problem? He said the problem was that people were going to protest against this with words of hate.

Coming from a background of working with children, I can tell members from experience that children do not care who is reading to them and what that person is wearing. Children care about whether someone is engaging and draws them into the story. Children care whether, at the end of the book, Sam's friend likes green eggs and ham. Children care about and want to know who did the business on the top of mole's head; a bit of a spoiler alert—it was Basil, the butcher's dog. Children care about what is in front of them. Children learn from what they see in the world around them. What the children would have experienced would have been an energetic, inclusive story occasion. They did not care what the person was wearing; they wanted to hear the stories. From all reports, the stories that were chosen, from books available in any library, were all about inclusion. Those are the messages we need to be teaching our children. We need to teach children that it does not matter what a person looks like or what their sexual orientation is; it is about who someone is as a person and how they present themselves in a world of love. That will benefit our children.

Unfortunately, the City of Bayswater had to bring this event forward because of the people who were standing outside with their messages of hate. They were messages of hate. I was horrified to think that people could go and stand there with those messages and yell those things at an event where children could possibly be present. What I witnessed was men, with their faces covered, videoing everybody who was protesting against their protest. I was one of them. I will confess that my west coast of Scotland schemey union organiser came out—I could not help myself—and anybody near me, if they could understand my accent, would have heard me shouting “Cowards”! I say to these men: you are cowards. If you cannot stand there with your face to the world and speak your convictions, how dare you be there. How dare you be there anyway, but what cowards! They covered their faces and stood there. They had masks, glasses and hats on. What are they so afraid of? They think they are such big, brave men. I was disgusted by the men who were trying to intimidate young women in the crowd—members of the rainbow community who were there with words of love and community, standing against these protesters with glitter and bubbles. It was joyful on one side. I was disgusted at the people who came over, again to the young women. They did not come and speak to me or the man next to me; they went over to these young women and passively aggressively said, “I'm not having this”—I am not going to use the words he used, because they were disgusting. He said, “I'm not having ‘this person’ spread words of”—I cannot even tell members the words because the things they were saying were so disgusting. If members have seen the signs, they will understand. It makes me sick to the stomach.

The next time there is drag story hour, I hope the people who are filled with hate—these cowards who cannot show their faces and hide behind masks—stay away from our children. If you do not want your children to go to drag story time, do not buy tickets and do not go; it is that simple. Keep your messages of hate away from our children and from our rainbow community.