

TRAVIS NELSON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
HOUSE DISTRICT 44
NORTH/NORTHEAST PORTLAND



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Testimony in Support of HR3

Chair Bowman, Vice-Chairs Drazen and Pham and Members of the House Committee on Rules,

My name is Travis Nelson, and I am the State Representative for House District 44 - North and Northeast Portland. I'm also the first openly LGBTQ+ African American to serve in the Oregon Legislature. That's a distinction that I don't take lightly. Regularly, I think about the fact that my district, which is neither largely Black or LGBTQ+, thought enough of me to send me to Salem to be their advocate, despite the fact that glass ceiling had not been broken over the course of our state's 163 year history. That said, I am honored to bring forth and testify in support of House Resolution 3 during Black History Month. This resolution recognizes and celebrates Oregon's vibrant history of Black drag performers. This, during a month in which we recognize the wide range of contributions of African Americans to both our state and the nation.

For decades, Black drag performers have pushed boundaries. From Stonewall to Darcelle's, they have uplifted communities and fought for equity and inclusion. They did this and continue to do this in a time and place that is not always welcome to such advocacy. And yet, through pageantry, performance, joy and art, they overcame both blatant homophobia and racism and have built a legacy that extends far beyond the stage in ways that that helped shape Oregon into a more vibrant, accepting, and dynamic state.

From the early titleholders to today's reigning monarchs, Black drag entertainers have used their platforms to advance rights for the entire LGBTQ+ community, fight for racial justice, and promote community empowerment. Their performances have raised essential funds for countless charities, educated the public on important issues like HIV prevention and LGBTQ+ marriage, and created spaces of joy, resistance, and belonging for those who need it most. Black drag artists in Oregon have made history both locally and nationally. These are individuals who are a part of the fabric of our state's cultural history, and it is long past time we formally recognize their contributions.

This resolution is not just a statement of acknowledgment, but a celebration of resilience, creativity, and community impact. The -1 amendment came after receiving feedback that there are even more Black Drag Queens who need to be recognized than were included in the base resolution. For further clarity, we introduced the -2 amendment to change Oregon to Portland. I believe that with the amendments, we have captured most of Oregon's extensive history of Black Drag artistry and clarified the city in which much of the rich history began. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this resolution and in honoring the trailblazers who are anchors and pillars of Oregon's LGBTQ+ community. I stand on their shoulders. They fought to bring members of the LGBTQ+ community out of the closet and into the light. It's time that they be recognized now, during Black History Month.

Thank you,

State Representative Travis Nelson
House District 44, North/NE Portland