

Dear Members of The City Club Board of Directors and Dan Moulthrop,

We write as a collective voice to express our deep concern and disappointment regarding the upcoming forum where The City Club of Cleveland has invited representatives from the Center for Christian Virtue (CCV) to speak. We respectfully but firmly urge The City Club to cancel or modify this forum in a way that does not platform an organization that has been designated by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) as an anti-LGBTQIA2S+ hate group.

We care deeply about The City Club's role in Northeast Ohio as a space for thoughtful civic discussion. That is precisely why this situation is so troubling. By providing unchallenged space to a group with a documented history of spreading harmful misinformation, The City Club risks undermining public trust, especially among marginalized communities. It also risks contributing to a climate that stigmatizes and harms the LGBTQIA2S+ community.

But we also believe in the power of civic institutions to do better. The City Club has an opportunity here: to demonstrate that it values not only the right to speak, but also the responsibility that comes with that platform.

Why This Matters

CCV's Record and Classification

The Center for Christian Virtue is not merely a conservative theological organization; the SPLC has classified it as a hate group because of its long history of spreading harmful misinformation about LGBTQIA2S+ people. Their rhetoric includes claims that LGBTQIA2S+ identities are "unhealthy and destructive." This is more than a difference of belief; such framing dehumanizes an entire community. We find it deeply troubling that The City Club, a venerable civic institution, would give such a group a prominent platform.

The Impact of Harmful Rhetoric

The kind of rhetoric CCV has espoused and promoted is not harmless. Providing a platform to an organization that stigmatizes LGBTQIA2S+ people contradicts The City Club's mission as a forum for civic discourse and betrays its foundation of mutual respect.

Not a Matter of Free Speech, But of Responsibility

This is not about silencing dissent or theological disagreement. Rather, it's about whether a respected civic institution should promote and elevate a group whose public messaging blatantly stigmatizes and harms. Free speech does not obligate institutions to give a microphone to prejudice.

Public Health Consequences

The rhetoric espoused by CCV and similar organizations is not without consequence. Data from the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law demonstrates that LGBTQIA2S+ people, particularly youth, face significantly higher risks of suicidal behavior:

- A study from the Institute found that 30% of young LGBTQIA2S+ adults (ages 18-25) have reported at least one suicide attempt in their lifetime.
- Experiencing conversion therapy, a practice often promoted or condoned by organizations aligned with CCV's theology, is strongly linked to suicidality: LGBTQIA2S+ individuals who have undergone

conversion therapy are nearly twice as likely to have seriously thought about or attempted suicide compared to their peers who have not.

- Furthermore, transgender individuals are at an even higher risk: Williams Institute research shows that about 40% of transgender adults have attempted suicide at some point in their lives.

These data clearly show that public discourse about LGBTQIA2S+ identities is not just philosophical; it is a matter of life and death.

Our Requests

Given the above information, we urge The City Club to take the following steps:

1. Reconsider the Forum as it currently stands, taking into consideration the entirety of The City Club's community. If the event proceeds, the program must be restructured to provide a genuinely balanced and informed discussion. This requires pairing CCV with an organization of equivalent political scale and influence - one that also shapes democracy through lobbying, legal advocacy, and policy engagement. Suitable counterparts include:

- ACLU of Ohio
- GLAAD
- Transgender Law Center
- Human Rights Campaign

These organizations have similar political and legislative influence and can counter harmful narratives with evidence-based analysis, legal context, and lived experiences from affected communities.

A restructuring of the panel to foster an intersectional, expert-driven discussion is imperative. An updated forum must include affirming LGBTQIA2S+ leaders, civil rights advocates, and mental health experts who can challenge misinformation in real time and ground the conversation in fact, legal precedent, and community realities.

2. We urge the inclusion of an external moderator. The Executive Director of The City Club cannot legitimately or credibly moderate this forum. Their direct organizational role presents a conflict of interest and undermines the neutrality required for such a high-stakes, politically sensitive discussion. A credible moderator must be independent, trained in navigating civil rights or constitutional issues, and capable of challenging extremist claims.

Recommended moderator profiles include:

- A civil rights attorney experienced in LGBTQIA2S+, First Amendment, or equal protection cases
- A legal scholar or political science professor specializing in democratic institutions, public policy, or anti-extremism
- A community-based expert with lived experience and professional grounding in LGBTQIA2S+ rights

A moderator from these backgrounds will ensure the conversation remains fair, evidence-based, and free from undue political influence.

3. We urge The City Club to disavow platforming hate speech. The City Club should publicly clarify that it does **not** endorse or legitimize anti-LGBTQIA2S+ rhetoric. A formal statement should:

- Distinguish between facilitating dialogue and platforming organized hate

- Reaffirm the City Club's stated values of inclusion, civic responsibility, and democratic integrity
- Communicate concrete steps being taken to protect marginalized communities and ensure responsible programming

4. We urge The City Club to ensure a balanced and responsible dialogue. If the forum continues, The City Club must structure the event so that diverse and impacted perspectives are not only present but also meaningfully centered. The goal is not false equivalence - it is to prevent extremism from going unchallenged, safeguard the integrity of public discourse, and model constructive civic engagement rooted in facts, law, and respect.

We respectfully call on The City Club's leadership to listen to this concern and take meaningful action. We are more than willing to help identify knowledgeable, respected panelists from our coalition and the broader community to create a revised forum that centers dignity, inclusion, and public health.

The City Club of Cleveland is one of the nation's great free speech forums. A product of the Progressive Era, you were founded in 1912 and are one of the nation's oldest continuous independent free speech forums, renowned for your tradition of debate and discussion. Do not let this legacy be tarnished by platforming hate.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response and hope that, together, we can ensure that civic discourse in Cleveland remains a force for good.

AIDS Healthcare Foundation
 Akron Indigenous Cultural Collective
 B. Riley Sober House
 CANAPI
 Cindy Strebig, Lakewood City Council Member
 Cleveland Aquatic Team
 Cleveland Burlesque
 Cleveland Stonewall Democrats
 CWRU AIDS Clinical Trials Unit
 Equality Ohio
 First Congregational Church of Akron UCC
 GLAAD
 Haus of Transcendent
 HRC Cleveland
 LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland
 Ohio Business Competes
 Ohioans Against Extremism
 PFLAG Akron
 Phantasy Community Foundation
 Plexus Education Foundation
 Plexus LGBT & Allied Chamber of Commerce
 The Bayard Rustin LGBTQ Resource Center
 TransJoy Akron
 Young Latino Network

Alan Brenner
Alyssa Roberts
Angelique Gates
Anja B. Smith
Ann thal
Anne Wise
Bella Sin
Brian Schultz
Brianna Zgodinski
Brooke Willis
Brooks Boron
Caitlin Johnson
Cathy Barber
Charlene P. Ligo
Charlotte Fowler
Chris Morgan VanCauwenberge
Claire Gauntner
Dan Mistak
Deborah Van Kleef
Deborah Vesy
Deirdre McPherson
Denise San Antonio Zeman
Donna Mazzola
Dorothy Valerian
Dr. Julie Evonna
Dwayne Steward
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Jenice Contreras
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Justin Joseph
Kathleen Fagan, MD
Kirby E Broadnax
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Louise Mosher
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Margaret Nash
Mary Jo Minello
Mary Zaller
Melanie K. Falls
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Nancy Mendez
Nancy Tondy
Pat Dillard
Paula J Kampf
Paula Woods
Peg Butler
Regina Webb
Rev. Ginger Marshall
Richard Cahoon
Rick Grahovac
Selina Pagan
Shaina Munoz
Shamus Dickinson
Shannon Viccarone
Stephanie Marsh
Stephen Sokany
Susan Harlow
Suzanne Hamilton
Terry Alai
Tom Stebel
Tony Correa
Tracy Glover Williams
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Tyler Stimpert
Vikas Gampa
Wendy Johnson MD MPH
William Detki