



Statement from the Co-Chairs of the Seattle Community Police Commission on Recent Enforcement Actions at Seattle LGBTQ+ Bars

Imagine relaxing or dancing at a bar on a Saturday night when a team of law enforcement officers arrive, shine flashlights on you and take your photo. That's what happened at multiple bars in Seattle last weekend. Four of those bars cater to LGBTQ+ patrons and three of them were threatened with lewd conduct citations.

The sweep by Seattle's Joint Enforcement Team, which is made up of Seattle police, fire and transportation employees and representatives of the state's Liquor and Cannabis Board, visited 18 locations over the weekend. While representatives of the board say the weekends' events were merely routine sweeps to look for liquor law violations, we can't help but see echoes of a disturbing history of anti-gay police harassment in these actions.

This combination of police sweeps, gay patrons and enforcement of the state's unfortunate lewd conduct statute has understandably put LGBTQ+ people on edge.

We oppose any harassment of the LGBTQ+ community and we are especially concerned when law enforcement officers enter gay bars – the very safe spaces where the LGBTQ+ community gathers – without warrants or warnings.

The Joint Enforcement Team did not find any alcohol-related offenses at the four LGBTQ+ bars and clubs they inspected. But officers warned managers at three of the clubs that they observed lewd conduct violations, which included seeing patrons wearing jockstraps and a bartender with a nipple exposed.

Law enforcement officers photographed bar patrons without their consent for these alleged violations, which also is cause for concern. If the photos are evidence, they will be subject to public records requests in the future. It is upsetting that photographs of marginalized community members enjoying themselves with an expectation of privacy could become part of a public government record.

Mayor Bruce Harrell said in a statement, "Under my administration, we will not target people or communities based on their sexuality or any other protected class. We understand concerns raised by the community based on a perception of violating this principle."

Because a complaint about the actions was made to the Police Accountability Board, the Seattle PD has not responded to questions about its role.

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While we are pleased by the recent actions of the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board to suspend enforcement of its lewd conduct rule that resulted in these events, the Seattle Community Police Commission champions policing practices centered in justice and equity. We expect Seattle's law enforcement to be applied equally and we oppose any police actions that deprive LGBTQ+ patrons from enjoying companionship and community in the spaces where they should feel safe.