

SONOMA COUNTY FAIR ADVOCACY TOOL KIT

The Advocacy Partners:

- [Marin Center for Independent Living \(Marin CIL\)](#)
- [Little People of America, Inc. \(LPA\)](#)
- The Coalition:

California Foundation for Independent Living Centers
Choice in Aging
Common Ground Society
Community Access Center
Dayle McIntosh Center
Disability Community Resource Center, Inc.
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
LPA Sacramento-San Joaquin Chapter
Marin Aging and Disability Institute
Matrix Parent Network and Resource Center
Resources for Independence Central Valley
SCIL
Silicon Valley Independent Living Center
World Institute on Disability

The Issue:

Disability advocates call on the Sonoma County Fair to cancel the “M”[slur] Wrestling Warriors performance at this year’s fair. The show promotes discrimination and bias against little people and other disabled persons.

After several attempts to reason with Fair executives, they have consistently diverted us to the show's performers. This disagreement is currently not with the shows' producers or performers, it is with the Sonoma County Fair that made the decision to contract the show and has the power to cancel the show.

Quotes:

"The show must go! Our opposition is not solely about the use of the "m"[slur] and its offensiveness, it is to the show itself - which is a visual expression of bias - and the marginalization it incites from the audience members. The visual performance showcases disabled persons chosen specifically for their disability as a form of entertainment." - Eileen Norman, President of LPA National

"I believe that the intent of it is to be amusing for others who are not disabled, which is exploitation and dehumanizing. The violence displayed in the program, whether real or acted, shows plot and characterizations that could validate bias against people with disabilities. I am a little person, my wife is disabled, we have a child. What happens if someone gets the message that it's ok to act out the sentiments in this show. I am not just being an advocate here, I need to protect my family." - Eli Gelardin, CEO of Marin CIL

"I grew up in this community and continue to live here. I've experienced bullying, strangers taking pictures of me and mistaking me for other little people. I've always loved the fair, when I was young I entered the art contest for the new fair logo. Now the fair has changed for me, I don't feel welcome anymore." - Olivia Glaubiger, Marin CIL Project Associate, LP Youth & Sonoma County Resident

"From the initial email and at each connection point the fair's executive has responded with diversion. This is not about the performers. This is about the fair taking ownership for their actions. If they had the power to make this mistake, they have the power to fix it. When people have to gaslight, they know they've done something wrong." - Ted Jackson, Sr. Advisor-Public Policy & Engagement for Marin CIL

Talking Points:

- The Show and "M"-slur:
 - Shows that make a spectacle out of disabled persons only dehumanize us for the entertainment of others. The show is an expression of ableism.

- The “M” word was created as a label used to refer to little people who were on public display for curiosity and sport. The national organization Little People of America considers this word a discriminatory slur.
- The choice to use the “M” slur on promotional materials is a choice to exploit little people for entertainment.
- When little people and individuals with disabilities are promoted as an amusement it communicates that our lives aren't serious and sets back our fight for civil rights.
- The Sonoma County Fair:
 - The Sonoma County Fair needs to create a diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility committee to review programming before making a final decision. If such a committee had been involved, offensive programming like this would not have been included.
 - The Sonoma County Fair is a public event, sponsored by multiple local, state and national public agencies. This is not what taxpayer and education dollars should be used to promote.
 - The Fair's mission should be rooted in bringing the community together and celebrating a positive image of everyone who makes up Sonoma County, instead of dividing the community by supporting bias.
 - The Sonoma County Fair has consistently attempted to divert meaningful discussion about the issue to the performers and away from their own responsibility in deciding to host this show. This is not about the performers, this is about the Sonoma County Fair making a poor decision and refusing to take ownership of it.
- Employment:
 - We have consistently asked that the performers still be paid, even if the show is canceled. It is not our intention to create hardship for other people with disabilities.
 - These performances further the cliched stereotype held to by people outside our community that LPs are unable to find work outside of these trope-style performances. A disappointingly large segment of society still believes that LPs are unable to find work and have no other options other than this.

- The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is twice that of the general population. Thirty three years after the passage of the ADA this is unacceptable, but tells us why so many disabled persons are lured into these types of occupations.
- In 2017, only 18.7% of disabled persons were employed, according to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). In contrast, the employment population ratio for those without a disability was 65.7%.
- Little people hold a wide variety of diverse vocations in a number of industries: Biotech, Legal, NonProfit, Government, Finance, Marketing, Fortune 500, etc. Career paths are just as diverse ranging from small business owners, sales associates, scientists and medical doctors, brokers and tax specialists, to teachers and disability activists. Disabled persons should be celebrated for their contributions to society not exploited for the entertainment of able-bodied people.
- The performers are not provided health care or appropriate medical attention when they inevitably are injured from these performances. Some injuries do not present themselves until later in life, such as permanent loss of function in lower extremities that can be exacerbated due to complications in skeletal dysplasia diagnosis, like spinal stenosis.

Media:

- [San Francisco Chronicle](#) featuring *Eileen Norman, President of Little People of America*
- [NBC Bay Area News](#) featuring *Eli Gelardin, CEO Marin Center for Independent Living*
- Social Media:
 - Follow and Boost: @Marin_CIL & @LPANational
 - Retweets
 - <https://twitter.com/MarinCIL/status/1685422475407179776?s=20>
 - <https://twitter.com/MarinCIL/status/1683964973138210819?s=20>
 - <https://twitter.com/MarinCIL/status/1685409178704400384?s=20>
 - Tags: @SonomaFair & *accounts above*
 - Hashtags: #SonomaFail / #CancelTheShow / #DisabilityPride / #DisabilityRights / #DisabilityTwitter

Take Action:

- [Join The Coalition](#)
- [Send a letter to the fair and Sonoma leaders](#)

Sonoma County Leadership: *for letters/emails*

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