AWP stands in solidarity with the LGBTQIA+ community.

Dear AWP Community,

The 2024 AWP Conference will be held in Kansas City, Missouri, February 7–10.

We are appalled and deeply concerned about transphobic legislation developing in Missouri—bills that would threaten the livelihood and basic healthcare needs of transgender people, as well as necessary gender-affirming care. This legislation is deeply troubling and antithetical to AWP’s inclusive mission of supporting writers and members from various backgrounds and life experiences.

Multiple transphobic legislative proposals, in particular [SB429](https://senate.mo.gov/23info/BTS_Web/Bill.aspx?SessionType=R&BillID=576477) and [HB498](https://legiscan.com/MO/text/HB498/2023), have been proposed in Missouri. These proposals are currently not included on the legislative calendar, indicating they have stalled in committees. Most likely, these proposals will not be introduced for a vote before the legislative session ends in May. However, regardless of the status, we share in the concern for the safety of LGBTQIA+ attendees and allies while attending #AWP24 in a state where these bills are under discussion.

As writers and members of the literary community, we believe that part of the goal of the conference is to foster communication and connection. We will do everything we can to ensure our members and allies remain safe at and around the Conference. We want to make #AWP24 a show of solidarity with the LGBTQIA+ community in the region—and a rallying cry for inclusion—by partnering with the diverse communities of writers and LGBTQIA+-owned businesses in Missouri and Kansas City. We hope that AWP’s commitment will provide financial and emotional support to the individuals and businesses who would be the most affected by this abhorrent legislation.

The Kansas City Convention Center has been scheduled as our venue since 2015 and was rescheduled from 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is financially and legally impossible for us to cancel, move, or postpone the conference out of Kansas City. To do so would put AWP in financial peril, meaning we would be unable to support future conferences and year-round writing resources to members in the way they have come to expect and value.

AWP will be in close and continued communication with contacts at the state and local levels, including Senator Greg Razer, Missouri’s first openly gay state Senator, and Kansas City Councilwoman Andrea Bough, both fierce opponents of these transphobic proposals. Please know that Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas, the Convention & Visitors Bureau, and local establishments are all working together to provide the most inclusive and safe experience for #AWP24.

Mayor Lucas strongly supports our goals and mission: “Kansas City is committed to fighting for equal rights for all in our city, no matter what happens in Washington, D.C. or our state capital, including and ensuring access to necessary health care services…You will be welcomed with open arms.”

For a complete list of initiatives in Kansas City aimed at inclusion for LGBTQIA+ visitors, citizens, and employees, and for ways that you can help champion this critical fight, click here [link to initiatives].

AWP will:

* Partner with the Kansas City LGBTQIA+ writers attending the conference to determine their needs and how AWP can best serve them;
* Create an Ad Hoc Committee of transgender individuals to help address safety and other concerns;
* Highlight LGBTQIA+ voices on the Conference Subcommittee;
* Encourage, develop, and feature programming centering on LGBTQIA+ voices;
* Designate bathrooms per floor in all AWP contracted spaces;
* Fundraise for the Community Scholarship to send as many local LGBTQIA+ writers to the Conference as possible, free of charge
* Spotlight transgender writers in our #WritersServe project, encouraging #AWP24 attendees to give back to the local community;
* Develop a list of trans-friendly establishments in Kansas City that would be inclusive and supportive for #AWP24 offsite events.

You will be receiving regular updates on this developing situation from us in the upcoming months. We ask you to work with us to support the Kansas City and Missouri communities that deeply need our backing and encouragement. In this divisive world where it’s too easy for hateful actions and speech to take precedence, let’s make this conference the most inclusive, safe, and compassionate conference ever.