

Protesters denounce start of Moms for Liberty summit in Philadelphia: ‘Hate has no place here’

Donald Trump is among those slated to speak at a gathering almost certainly to draw national attention.



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What you should know

- Protesters took to the streets Thursday to denounce the Moms For Liberty summit happening in Center City this weekend.
- Moms For Liberty is a controversial "parental rights" group that has targeted LGBTQ issues and diversity education.
- Former president Donald Trump and Republican 2024 presidential candidate Gov. Ron DeSantis are scheduled to speak Friday.

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With rallies, assorted protests, banned-book giveaways, and a decidedly unwelcoming message to the conventioners from the mayor, the four-day summit by the controversial “parental rights” group [Moms for Liberty](#) got [underway Thursday night](#) in Philadelphia.



As if its controversial agenda weren't enough — it has pushed for book bans and limiting classroom discussions about race and gender identity — the gathering in all likelihood will generate national attention, with former

President Donald Trump and another Republican 2024 presidential candidate, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, scheduled to speak.

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And well before the proceedings started Thursday, they drew the attention of demonstrators who gathered under the smoky skies during the afternoon at LOVE Park and outside the Philadelphia Downtown Marriott, where about 650 conventioners were staying.

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Then, a few hours later, chanting “Philly is a trans city” and “Philly is a Black city,” a boisterous group of more than 50 assembled at the corner of Third and Chestnut Streets outside the Museum of the American Revolution, which was hosting a reception for the conventioners Thursday evening.

In a tense exchange, police threatened to arrest anyone who blocked traffic. The protesters then pivoted to dancing and chanting and taunting every charter bus that off-loaded a fresh group of summit attendees. The chants were accompanied by queer anthems such as Beyoncé’s “Break My Soul.” One arrest was reported later.

Wearing heart-shaped glasses, trans youth Sam Donagi, 16, amped the crowd. ” They want to eradicate my queer joy and make this a society for them and not for everyone,” Donagi said.

[Despite the protests of several historian groups](#), museum officials — who told staff they could take the night off if they felt unsafe — have defended their hosting of the event, saying their aim is “to share diverse and inclusive stories about our nation’s history with the broadest audience possible.”

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“We urge all museums and history organizations to think judiciously about the groups that are allowed to use their spaces and the impact these decisions have,” the American Association for State and Local History said in a statement.

Moms for Liberty was founded in Florida in 2021 by two women, Tiffany Justice and Tina Descovich, who the group says are former school board members “who witnessed how short-sighted and destructive policies directly hurt children and families.” Among other activities, it trains potential school board

candidates.

“We spread awareness and an understanding of the limited role of government,” the group says on its website. “We promote teaching the principles of liberty in our homes and community.”

No summit attendees were available for comment, as police were quick to usher in guests arriving at the museum for the Moms for Liberty welcoming event.

While the group started with parents wanting schools to reopen during the COVID pandemic, it has turned [to targeting diversity education and how schools address LGBTQ issues](#).

The Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights organization that has long tracked domestic extremism, has designated Moms for Liberty [an extremist “antigovernmental” group](#), citing its support of [abolishing the federal Department of Education](#), and accusations that teachers unions are responsible for indoctrination.

In his statement, Mayor Jim Kenney called the group's "attempts to disregard history, ban books, and silence conversations about race, gender, and sexuality ... harmful to youth."

However, he took a tact similar to the museum, saying the city would "protect the constitutional rights of all individuals without regard to the views expressed by any group."

The group, which has strong financial backing from Republicans, says it has more than 275 chapters, with the heaviest concentrations in Florida and eastern Pennsylvania.

But it evidently was not particularly welcome in Philadelphia, where Democrats hold a 7-1 registration advantage.

Dozens of people attended a rally shortly after 3 p.m. at LOVE Park to denounce the group and what it stands for.

"They showed up in your town," Bernita Bradley, director of parent voice at the National Parents Union, said to the dozens who had gathered at LOVE Park

around 3 p.m. for the banned-book giveaway that the union sponsored.

“Do they represent your town?” Bradley asked. A resounding “No” echoed through the park.

Among those attending was Jane Cramer, the parent of an incoming senior in the Pennridge School District. She said she had skipped a planned camping trip Friday, after the district moved to [remove LGBTQ pride flags and other “advocacy materials”](#) in the classrooms.

Kate Nazemi, a parent in the Central Bucks School District, where [pride flags were banned in the classrooms](#), said the people against diversity are in the “minority.”

She added, “The most important thing a student needs from the education environment is to know they are loved,” Nazemi said. “And our teachers are trying to show that with one hand tied behind their back.”

Several protests are planned though the weekend, including a banned book read-athon, dance party protests, and mobile billboards set to circle the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown.

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At the Marriott, members of the Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs, which is holding its biennial conference at the hotel, were surprised to learn the Marriott was hosting Moms for Liberty at the same time.

“I just did a double take and I couldn’t believe it,” said Eric Weis, 72, of Wayne,

N.J., a longtime board member, adding his group had booked first.

In a statement, the federation said that “while the FJMC recognizes that Moms for Liberty and their speakers have the constitutional right to peaceably assemble, the FJMC does not endorse either the organization, its leadership, or the sentiments that they or their speakers may express.”

He said he and a handful of other members decided not to attend. Marriott officials did not respond to a request for comment.

In a letter to the hotel, Weis said, “the Moms For Liberty event in Philadelphia is beyond bizarre.”

“I have stayed at Marriott properties hundreds of times,” he wrote. “I can assure you that I will NEVER AGAIN spend another penny at any Marriott location for the rest of my life. ... Your Philadelphia staff has made a gross error in putting oil and water together in the same hot pot.”

For Alana Byrd, the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors and a resident of Elkins Park, the Moms for Liberty group’s behavior evoked the pre-Holocaust era. She said the recent slew of book bans and anti-LGBTQ legislation was reminiscent of the tales her grandparents told her. “My parents told me their story and this is exactly how it starts, with people censoring things in schools and libraries and telling other people what they can and cannot do,” Byrd said.

“Hate has no place here,” Byrd said. “This is the City of Brotherly Love and we should make sure to keep it that way.”

Staff writers Maddie Hanna, Oona Goodin-Smith and Julia Terruso contributed to