

**FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE****CONTACT**

Adrianna Paidas
646-762-8704
adrianna.paidas
@beckmedia.com

Aisha Almada, ITVS
415-356-8383
aisha.almada@itvs.org

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visit pbs.org/pressroom

NEW DOCUMENTARY “MAMA BEARS” PUTS THE SPOTLIGHT ON THE FIERCELY PROTECTIVE CHRISTIAN MOTHERS WHO ADVOCATE FOR THEIR LGBTQ+ CHILDREN, PREMIERING ON PBS’S INDEPENDENT LENS JUNE 20, 2023

March 17, 2023

*Filmmaker Daresha Kyi Presents an Intimate, Thought-Provoking
Exploration of Faith, Self-Acceptance, and LGBTQ+ Life in
Conservative Christian Communities*

(San Francisco, CA) March 17, 2023 — Spread across the country and connected through private Facebook support groups, a network of women call themselves “mama bears,” because of the ferocity with which they fight for the rights of their LGBTQ+ children. Though many of these mothers may have grown up as fundamentalist, evangelical Christians, they are now risking losing friends, families, and faith communities to champion their kids—even if it challenges their belief systems.

From Emmy® Award-winning director Daresha Kyi, “Mama Bears” makes its broadcast debut on INDEPENDENT LENS, June 20, 2023, at 10:00 p.m. ET (check local listings), and also will be available to stream on the PBS App.

“Mama Bears” follows the journeys taken by Kimberly Shappley and Sara Cunningham, two mama bears whose profound love for their LGBTQ+ children has turned them into advocates for the queer community. Shappley shares her story of wrestling with the conservative Christian beliefs and values she grew up with while raising her young transgender daughter, Kai. Reconciling her

faith with Kai's identity leads Kimberly to navigate new territory during the controversial bathroom bill legislation introduced in Texas.

Similarly, Cunningham opens up about connecting with and finding support from other mothers of LGBTQ+ children through the mama bears' private Facebook group. Through her son's journey to come out, Cunningham begins to reconcile her own conservative Christian beliefs and eventually creates Free Mom Hugs, a nonprofit and movement that brings groups of fellow mama bears to Pride Parades and events across the country every year to offer hugs.

At the heart of the film is the story of Tammi Terrell Morris, a young African American lesbian whose struggle for self-acceptance exemplifies why the mama bears are so vital. The documentary shows how Morris battled with her identity for years, walked away from the church to explore her sexuality, and then later denounced her lifestyle within the LGBTQ+ community. She ultimately comes to embrace her authentic self and embarks on a journey to become an LGBTQ+ advocate within the church.

Through these stories and others from the mama bears' Facebook group, the documentary illuminates the unequivocal power of unconditional love in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights. The mama bears' movement continues to surge, as their Facebook network lists membership at tens of thousands of members.

"When I first learned about the mama bears, I felt instantly compelled to tell the stories of these amazing, fierce women who have been transformed by love for their children. From the beginning, my hope was that by sharing their journeys, the film would bridge seemingly insurmountable divides between conservative Christians and the queer community, and help bring healing to LGBTQ+ people who may have been rejected by religious family members," said filmmaker Daresha Kyi. "With the film's broadcast on INDEPENDENT LENS, I'm excited for it to reach even larger audiences and find the people who need its message of hope the most."

"Mama Bears" received co-production support from ITVS through its Open Call funding initiative, which supports projects through completion for broadcast on public television.

Visit the "[Mama Bears](#)" page on INDEPENDENT LENS for more information about the film.

About the Filmmakers

Daresha Kyi, Director

Daresha Kyi creates both narrative and documentary film and television in Spanish and English. Her second feature, "Mama Bears," is about how conservative, Christian mothers are transformed when they accept their LGBTQ+ children. Her short, "Texas Strong," won two Webbys and an Emmy, and her first feature, "Chavela," screened in over 40 countries.

Laura Tatham, Producer

Laura Latham is a creative documentary producer working on the feature "What We Carry," having most recently completed the feature "Mama Bears" and the short "Black Beauty." In 2022, Laura was selected for DOC NYC's "40 Under 40" list. She has been a fellow of the Film Independent Documentary Lab and the WIF/Sundance Institute Financing Intensive.

CREDITS

Director/Producer

Daresha Kyi

Producer

Laura Tatham

Executive Producers

Lois Vossen

Sally Jo Fifer

Visit the INDEPENDENT LENS [website](#) for more information.

ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

INDEPENDENT LENS is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series, airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 p.m. ET. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, Action Family Giving, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram at @independentlens.



ABOUT ITVS

ITVS is a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization that has, for over 25 years, funded and partnered with a diverse range of documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning films, and then airs [them](#) for free on PBS via our weekly series, INDEPENDENT LENS, as well as on other PBS series, and through our digital platform, OVEE. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, The National Endowment for the Humanities: American Rescue Plan, Acton Family Giving, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and Wyncote Foundation. For more information, visit itvs.org.

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1435 FOLSOM STREET
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94103
T. 415 356 8383
F. 415 356 8391
PBS.ORG/INDEPENDENTLENS