

Statement from Arizona Men of Leather Regarding IML's Pre-Approved Feeder Contest System

The Leather Community is a patchwork of communities scattered across the country and around the world. For the past 50 years, we have looked to International Mr. Leather as a gathering place for those communities and a rallying point for our shared traditions.

Arizona Men of Leather is one of many vibrant Leather clubs and organizations serving the Phoenix and Arizona region. Our club produces the Mr. Anvil Phoenix title contest, supports our titleholders as they prepare to represent their community, and was proud to serve as an Advocate Sponsor of IML 2026.

We understand that the growth of the IML contestant class presents genuine health, safety, logistical and practical challenges. A contest of IML's size cannot realistically accommodate an unlimited number of contestants without careful planning. Our concern is not that IMLBB has recognized those challenges. Our concern is with the structure it has chosen in response.

On September 10, IMLBB published a list of 50 pre-approved feeder contests. Titleholders representing those contests will continue to receive direct access to the IML contestant class. Titleholders representing every other contest are encouraged to apply but must first compete for a limited number of wildcard positions through a pre-qualification process whose standards have not yet been publicly explained beyond being determined by IML.

This creates an institutional hierarchy within the Leather Community. Access to the IML stage will now depend first upon the historical record, geographic placement and accumulated points of the contest behind a titleholder, before that individual's own qualifications are considered.

A strong candidate representing a title outside the pre-approved system may be denied even the opportunity to compete at IML. At the same time, a less-prepared candidate representing a pre-approved title would continue to receive direct access to the contest. The individual is not being evaluated first. Access is being determined by the status assigned to the organization behind them.

We find the establishment of this class structure deeply troubling. The Leather Community has long sought to provide fellowship, belonging and chosen family to people who have encountered barriers elsewhere. Leather history has not been free of exclusion or inequality, but these imposed distinctions remain contrary to the values of equity and community that Leather culture, at its best, asks us to uphold.

We are bewildered that a community so familiar with the consequences of structural inequality would deliberately create a protected path for some while placing a new barrier in front of everyone else. Whatever its intention, the message received by those outside the pre-approved system is that certain organizations belong inside the established circle while the rest must first prove that they are worthy to enter.

The effects extend well beyond a titleholder's application. Local contests rely upon volunteers, venues, sponsors, donors and community members who invest significant time and resources in helping titleholders prepare for IML. For months, Arizona Men of Leather and members of our community have supported our Mr. Anvil Phoenix 2026 titleholder, Wayne "Bloo" Kuwanhyoima II, with the understanding that he would be eligible to enter IML 50 under the same process available to previous titleholders.

The announcement has changed that expectation after local preparation and fundraising were already underway. It also affects what we can responsibly tell future contestants and donors about where their efforts may lead. This is not solely about one titleholder or one contest year. It changes the relationship among local contests, their communities and IML.

We recognize that IMLBB is likely now aware that the only Arizona contest on the pre-approved list is defunct. We do not ask that Mr. Anvil Phoenix simply be added to the list or substituted in its place.

Doing so would benefit our contest without resolving our objection. Arizona Men of Leather rejects the premise that some contests should be designated for automatic access while all others are placed outside that preferred structure. We do not seek an advantage for ourselves that depends upon maintaining a disadvantage for someone else.

Arizona Men of Leather has requested the complete dataset used to develop the pre-approved feeder-title list, as IMLBB has invited qualifying contest producers to do. We look forward to reviewing that information. Regardless of what the data set ultimately shows, however, our concern extends beyond whether the correct contests received pre-approved status. Our concern is the class-based structure created by the designation itself.

Therefore, Arizona Men of Leather respectfully urges IMLBB to accept entrants for IML 50 under the rules and entry process in place before the September 10 announcement.

Titleholders and their communities have already spent months planning, fundraising and preparing based upon those rules. Applying a consequential new access system at this point places an unfair burden upon current titleholders and disrupts commitments already made by their clubs, producers, sponsors and supporters.

For future IML contests, we ask IMLBB to establish an open consultation process involving contest producers, titleholders and regional Leather organizations before implementing a permanent replacement system. We recognize that IMLBB may not maintain a complete directory of every contest producer. That challenge can be addressed through a publicly announced invitation, producer registration, direct outreach to known contests, and open virtual listening sessions through which established, smaller and emerging contests can all make themselves known.

A process affecting the entire network of local contests should be informed by more than historical applicant data alone. The people who produce these contests, mentor their titleholders, raise the necessary funds and sustain their local Leather communities should have a meaningful opportunity to participate in shaping what comes next.

We offer these concerns because Arizona Men of Leather values IML and wants it to remain a place where Leather communities from around the world can gather on equitable terms. We believe its growth should be met with imagination, transparency and consultation, without dividing the communities that helped make that growth possible.

Respectfully,

Mike Sanchez

President

Arizona Men of Leather