

Linda Harvey Testimony HB 249

To Chair Thomas and members of the committee, thank you for considering my testimony in favor of HB 249. My name is Linda Harvey and I am president of Mission America. I also serve on the board of Protect Ohio Children.

House Bill 249 is very strongly needed in the current highly charged and increasingly sexualized climate of our state and nation. For some reason, there are growing numbers of people who have little common sense and good judgment regarding what is appropriate for children. We see this in a number of different environments including schools, libraries, gyms, and public events.

Recently, many communities have had to manage the justifiable outrage of parents when a performer in “drag” was scheduled to appear in a local public venue. Sometimes it’s a library, sometimes a school, and sometimes it is a private organization. Even though the defenders of these performances insist this is simply the equivalent of “dress up,” these engagements often deteriorate into sexually explicit performances, even if they were not advertised as such. And just the appearance of a person masquerading as a caricature of the opposite sex is disturbing to children in ways that they may not even be able to verbalize.

Parades are another venue where this occurs. More and more children in recent years are being taken by parents and other adults to “pride” parades where partial nudity may be on display.

A parade is a type of performance. When a person marches in a parade, he or she knows there’s an audience and that it’s a visible statement of support to participate in that day’s entertainment, which is the parade itself. No one should be excused from decency of dress while marching in a parade, and yet it is very common in “pride” parades to see semi-nude males and topless females, some mimicking sexual activity. No child/teen should be exposed to this.

We are long past the time where we should trust the good judgment of people who advocate these activities. New regulations are needed to address low-standard conduct. And the people who think this is acceptable are the problem, not those who expect respectable behavior from adults.

There are many known examples of this extremely poor judgment.

A [male at a gym in Xenia](#) exposed himself to patrons in the female locker room. The charges were dropped for some inexplicable reason. No male should ever invade an area designated for female privacy and the court ignored the complaints of females in this case.

A [“drag” performance in Celina, OH](#) created a local controversy when the scantily-clad performer twerked and gyrated in the presence of children in the audience.

A [questionable event](#) was planned for a West Newark, Ohio library in June 2019 for youth ages 12 to 17, with parents discouraged from being present in the room. Adolescents were to learn about

being a “drag queen” and also given lessons on “safe sex.” The event was cancelled after community outrage. It was possibly planned to be a drag queen performance for youth without parents present. When parents are excluded, who knows whether indecency would have occurred? The track record of public decency during such performances is extremely poor.

Another [questionable event](#) was planned but ultimately cancelled at a Delaware County library in 2019. Here’s how it was promoted: “Drag 101—Teen Program. Curious about the art of drag and no idea where to start? Come learn the basics with former Miss Gay Ohio America, Selena T. West! All genders welcome; drag is for everyone! Teens only, please.” Parents were not welcome, so again, who knows what the activities were going to include? The event moved to a private business and again, no parents? Who knows what was going to take place?

Events are held at the headquarters of private organizations where adolescents are invited [without parents present or even notified](#) (another problem in and of itself). Who knows what is happening behind closed doors? Shouldn’t there be state regulations—and parents ALWAYS allowed-- to protect youth in these situations?

This bill should also cover the offense of adults who [allow children to be on display](#) in any type of inappropriate performance. A nine-year old boy dressed as a female was the “entertainment” at a bar in Lancaster in 2018 where he gyrated, did high kicks and splits and was given cash tips. He was wearing a pink leotard trimmed in black fringe, fishnet stockings, a woman's wig, high-heel booties, and full makeup. The first adult who saw this, and certainly the bar owner, should have intervened and stopped the performance.

There was a “Drag” Race at the Teen Zone of Cincinnati Pride on June 29, sponsored by GLSEN of Greater Cincinnati. Most “pride” weekends now prominently feature “drag” performances and most welcome even pre-teens to attend.

I urge you to vote “yes” on HB 249 and let’s put a stop to indecency on display for our children. Thank you.