

Chairman Thomas, Vice-Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and Members of the Ohio House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of HB 249, the Indecent Exposure Modernization Act.

My name is Jason King and I reside in Celina, OH. I have served our community for 16 years as the president of our city council. I also serve as a high school wrestling coach in our community. Aside from being a pastor, which is my full-time job, I enjoy the titles of “husband” and “father of 4” most of all.

- I want to apologize in advance for my candor and for my allusion to explicit quotes that I will be sharing. For the few years, a local pride event has included a “drag queen” show in our city Park during their Pride Day celebration. The so called “performances” were filled with obscene sexual gestures, provocative dancing, partial nudity, and obscene signs carried about by adults and children alike. 2 such examples are: 1) a sign that read “TRUMP, the only D\*\*k I can’t handle,” an obvious sexual reference, where the letter “i” in the vulgar word was a picture of a male phallus. This sign was carried by a pre-teen adolescent. 2) the second example was a sign referring to an oral sex act. Also, at this event there were vendors present who were selling inappropriate items depicting male genitalia – plush pillows resembling a male phallus and other various toys/ items of the same. All of this was done in our public park with children present! This goes well beyond the stated purpose of the organizing group as written in their lease agreement with the city to use our park, “to enjoy live music along with food vendors and crafts for sale during the event.” No mention of drag shows and certainly no mention of vulgar signage or the selling of genitalia shaped items.
- During many of our city council meetings in the past few years we have had much debate between citizens over the inappropriate nature of these adult themed performances. It has caused much animosity amongst the people of our community... of which the vast majority stands firmly against such displays, as evidenced by the sheer number of voices who have spoken out against it. The inappropriate actions mentioned are a clear violation of our city’s park rules as well as the General Offense code of our codified ordinances, which mirror the ORC. Something is deemed “harmful to juveniles” if the material or performance is patently offensive to the prevailing standards in the adult community as a whole, with respect to what is suitable for juveniles. In our park rules, it is stated that “no person shall engage in disorderly conduct by being insulting, or using indecent language (which would include indecent signage), or engaging in disorderly conduct or behavior. No person shall use any facility or section of the municipal parks at any time for any indecent or immoral purpose.”

- Today I implore this committee to take swift action to enact this bill in order to protect our children from further obscene and harmful interactions in public spaces. Our public parks are specifically designed for individuals and families to congregate in freely and enjoy without the worry of feeling compromised or being violated. Under the First Amendment banner of free speech, these individuals claim that they can basically do as they please in our public spaces as a guaranteed right. But one person's First Amendment rights should not be sacrificed at the expense of another's. This is patently un-American and discriminatory to those who choose NOT to be exposed to such content. Again, I implore this committee to take action in order to give communities, like ours, the legal support necessary to enforce our own ordinances and rules, which clearly represent the values that we espouse to.
- On February 12, 2024 our city Council overwhelmingly approved a Resolution of support for the very similar, previous bill: HB 245 in order to support family values and prevent exposure of minors to certain adult themed entertainment.
- The changes HB 249 will bring to the already established Ohio Revised Code in no way cause others to surrender their free speech. Our parks already prohibit the presence and the consumption of alcohol in them. That is not to say that we as a city are against the right of people to consume alcohol. There's a time and a place for that if you so choose, but not in our parks and not in the presence of children in public spaces. Likewise, there's a time and a place for adult-themed performances, if one should choose or prefer such, but NOT in the presence of children or unsuspecting families using the parks on the day of such events.
- Ohio's children should be protected from obscene performances in public spaces. Our children and our families are under attack. "How," you may ask? Let me conclude my time by quoting a man who was dressed in drag, who spoke on our courthouse lawn in opposition to what is being proposed: "I won't change your little town... Your children will! Your children will see us... Your children will love us... And your children will JOIN US!" As a father, and as a pastor, I take great offense to such threats to my children and the morality that I have instilled within them.
- Protecting our children from exploitation and threat against their innocence is a matter of utmost importance.

Thank you for your service to the citizens of Ohio and your time and consideration of my testimony today in support of HB 249