

## Support testimony for HB 249

You may be aware that the small town of Celina, Ohio has been the center of controversy concerning an annual drag show in the city park which has been advertised by organizers of the event as “family friendly” and has been marketed to children.

In June of 2023, in a matter of just a few weeks, over 600 signatures were collected from local citizens who objected to how this drag show had been conducted in previous years. Objectionable elements of this event included but were not limited to the following:

- A man was videotaped at the 2022 drag show distributing dollar bills to children, who were then videotaped using those same bills to tip the drag queens in a manner that would mimic a scene in a strip club.
- A drag queen wearing a dress, who was later discovered to have had an extensive criminal record, including a conviction for prostitution, was videotaped in his performance doing a high kick for children, revealing his crotch area.
- As part of his performance, another drag queen, wearing an outfit that revealed a large portion of his buttocks, was videotaped twerking on the pavement in front of children. This same drag queen was also videotaped on the ground, on his back, with his legs spread, revealing his crotch area. As he took tips from the children, he was also taped giving them kisses.
- Several of the drag queens were discovered to be AFAB (assigned female at birth) performers who are essentially adult performers (i.e., strippers). Their performances, to no one’s surprise, were sexualized.
- Through the work of a private investigator, it was discovered that a number of scheduled drag queens whose names and identities had been concealed—only their stage names were released to the public—had criminal records.
- The public social media pages of many of the drag queens were replete with advertisements for adult venues in which they were scheduled to perform. Some of these same ads featured semi-nude photos and sado-masochistic themes and attire, leaving me to question whether these individuals are even capable of a performance that is suitable for children.

As these and other details emerged prior to the 2023 event, members of the community appealed to Small Town Pride organizers with the request that the drag show be moved away from the park (which is designed to attract children with its splash pad and playground equipment) to an adult-only venue. They steadfastly refused, repeatedly assuring us that the event would be clean this time around. In spite of those assurances, the drag queens were once again videotaped twerking and mimicking a strip act (e.g., in the case of one performer, plastic bags which were intended to represent his bra and panties were pulled out from under his dress and twirled in the air).

Year after year, our community has been assured that the upcoming drag show would be “family friendly” and suitable for children. Year after year, these performances have been held in the presence of children and have turned out to be anything but family friendly. They are inherently sexual performances.

Though I'm not a licensed counselor, my background as a pastor includes decades of family counseling. It is my opinion that children are generally neither intellectually nor emotionally equipped to process sexual images, messages, and performances, much less those which intentionally obscure gender categories. Younger children in particular are especially vulnerable to confusion and potential exploitation arising from premature introduction to sexual content.

I am not the first to ask why drag queens are insistent on performing for young children. Why don't we hear of drag shows in nursing homes? The answer seems obvious. One audience is far more impressionable than the other. Childhood innocence is something to be protected, not exploited. Those who imagine a personal right to compromise that very innocence should not be granted priority over the safety and well-being of Ohio's children.

Once again, thank you for your time and attention. I strongly urge the committee to vote YES on HB 249.

Respectfully,

Shawn Meyer