



Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 249. My name is the Rev. Dr. Ben Huelskamp, and I serve as the Executive Director of LOVEboldly, an Ohio faith-based nonprofit working to create spaces where LGBTQIA+ people can flourish in Christianity. I also serve as the pastor of Blue Ocean Faith Columbus, a small, progressive Christian congregation.

As a community leader, pastor, and proud native Ohioan, I have serious concerns about HB249 and its impact on the legitimate art form of drag as well as its impact on the Transgender community in the State of Ohio. However, you have and will continue to hear from many people who can speak to those points far better than me. I want to focus on one point that is vitally important to this bill and reflects the far-reaching implications of the bill's broad and vague language.

In defining an "adult cabaret," HB249 states that an adult cabaret includes spaces where "Performers or entertainers who exhibit a gender identity that is different from the performer's or entertainer's biological sex using clothing, makeup, prosthetic or imitation genitals or breasts, or other physical markers." Based on this definition, the public ministry of a clergy person who identifies as transgender would render their church an adult cabaret and, if people under the age of 18 were present, would make that public ministry a felony under this bill. Criminalizing public ministry is not only a violation of the First Amendment, but also a dangerous precedent.

For this reason alone, HB249 should be abandoned in this committee. And the constitutional problems I have described are only the beginning of this bill's harms.

I urge you in the strongest possible terms to vote down HB249 and not to send the bill to the House floor.

Respectfully,

Rev. Dr. Ben Huelskamp +
Executive Director, [LOVEboldly](https://loveboldly.org)
Pastor, [Blue Ocean Faith Columbus](https://blueoceanfaithcolumbus.org)
bhuelskamp@loveboldly.org

Creating and developing spaces where LGBTQIA+ people can flourish in Christianity.

30 E. College Ave., Westerville, OH 43081 | EIN: 81-1869501

www.loveboldly.org | admin@loveboldly.org | 614.918.8109