

Dear Judiciary Committee,

As a rabbi and a resident of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, I am writing with concern about HB 249, which would criminalize a constitutionally protected art form and interfere with parental authority.

Gender nonconforming performance is not new or radical. It is deeply embedded in American and Western culture. From ancient Greece to Shakespeare to modern times, actors often dress in drag as part of their theatrical performance.

Furthermore, drag is a form of artistic, cultural, religious, personal, and political expression — all of which are protected by the First Amendment. In Judaism, it is common to celebrate the holiday of Purim by putting on plays that tell the story of the Book of Esther, with the actors often dressed in drag. This bill would criminalize constitutionally protected religious freedom.

When it comes to children, I am concerned that this bill would take decision power away from parents. Parents, not politicians, should decide what they feel is appropriate for their children to see. HB 249 has no exception for parental consent or for parents attending drag performances with their children. Furthermore, the bill does not distinguish between elementary- and high school-aged kids, or between adult's and children's spaces, thus potentially banning performances where young children aren't even present.

It's also important to note that, if a performance is obscene or harmful to juveniles, it is *already illegal* under Ohio law. HB 249 doesn't fill a gap, it just offers legal cover for discrimination, while interfering with parental authority and criminalizing constitutionally protected freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

I therefore urge you to oppose HB 249.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Rabbi Miriam Geronimus  
Cleveland Heights, OH