

**Opponent Testimony on Ohio HB 249 – “Indecent Exposure Modernization Act”**  
Before the Ohio House Judiciary Committee

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the Committee:

My name is Pierre Wolfe. I am a resident of Columbus, Ohio, and I am submitting this testimony in strong opposition to House Bill 249, the so-called “Indecent Exposure Modernization Act.” While the bill is framed as a modernization of existing statutes, its practical effect is to expand the government’s authority to police personal expression and appearance in ways that raise serious concerns under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. The language of HB 249 risks criminalizing forms of personal expression that fall outside the sponsors’ narrow interpretation of social norms, giving the state sweeping discretion to punish individuals based on how they present themselves in public. The First Amendment protects not only speech but expressive conduct and identity. Laws that broadly target expression tied to personal identity invite arbitrary enforcement and chill constitutionally protected freedoms.

This bill also carries troubling implications for the LGBTQ+ community and others who do not conform to traditional gender expectations. History shows that vague “decency” laws have frequently been used to target marginalized communities, particularly people whose appearance or gender expression challenges rigid norms. HB 249 risks reviving that pattern by creating legal tools that could be selectively enforced against transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming individuals simply for existing in public spaces. Ohio law should protect the dignity and safety of all residents, not create new pathways for harassment, profiling, or discrimination under the guise of morality legislation.

Finally, legislation like HB 249 diverts attention from the genuine responsibilities of this body: ensuring public safety, protecting constitutional liberties, and addressing the real challenges facing Ohioans. Expanding criminal statutes to regulate identity, clothing, or gender expression does nothing to improve public safety, but it does expose the state to costly constitutional challenges and undermines the fundamental American principle that government should not dictate how individuals express themselves. I respectfully urge the Committee to reject HB 249 and instead uphold the constitutional freedoms and personal dignity of all Ohioans.

Thank you for your consideration.

Pierre Wolfe