

Dear Judiciary Committee,

As a rabbi and a resident of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, I am deeply concerned about HB 249, which would criminalize what is constitutionally protected while undermining parental authority.

Gender nonconforming performance is an established part of both American and western culture, going back to Greece and Shakespeare.

Even more importantly, drag is protected by the First Amendment in its artistic, cultural, religious, personal and political expression. In Judaism, many dress in drag on the holiday of Purim. This bill would criminalize our constitutional right to religious freedom as well.

Parents should decide what they feel is appropriate for their children to see. HB 249 has no exception for parental consent or supervision. The bill also does not distinguish between ages of children or between adult and children's spaces, potentially banning performances when young children aren't even present.

Ohio law already bans any performances that are harmful to juveniles. HB 249 doesn't fill a gap, it just offers legal cover for discrimination.

I urge you to oppose HB 249

Thank you for your time on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Micah Shapiro
Cleveland Heights, OH