

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Syneberg, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 249.

My name is Steven Dunn, and I'm an active Ohio voter, member of the community, and a 26-year public servant for The Ohio Department of Health here testifying in my personal capacity. I'm also a Drag Queen. From the time I was little I knew being a performer was in my blood and after graduating from Grove City High School I moved to New York City to pursue my dreams like millions of other people. While working as a struggling actor I found a restaurant called LIPS, which was a drag queen restaurant in the historic Greenwich Village. They would serve food and break into shows every half hour and it allowed me to make money but also get to perform. One of the roles I had while in NYC was that of "Mary Sunshine" in the musical Chicago, which if you don't know is normally portrayed by a male in drag.

Drag has been a part of Human Culture since Shakespearian times and has appeared in American culture on TV (Flip Wilson, Carol Burnett show, Bosom Buddies) and movies (Tootsie, Mrs. Doubtfire, Too Wong Foo) for years. Many famous actors and comedians have used drag as a way to entertain. Those of us who are performers in this art form have been leaders in our community. In the Columbus Drag Community thanks to pioneers like Virginia and Nina West we have raised over 3 million dollars for local and national charities. We are the first to come to aid when someone needs assistance or an organization is struggling to get funding. We are the people who have spoken up for LGBTQIA+ rights and inclusion, and this community are the ones taking arrows with bills like HB 249.

As I'm sure you're all aware, the idea of giving an "adult cabaret performance" in front of children is already illegal thanks to ORC Section 2907.31, and the words "adult cabaret" alone are exactly used to describe shows for those who are 21 and over. Just like with other forms of entertainment - TV, movies, plays, concerts - drag performance content can cater to very different audiences and very different age groups. But, while a parent can take their

child to an R-rated movie, House Bill 249 would ban drag performances across the board where juveniles may be present - no matter if the “juvenile” in question is seven years old or 17 years old or whether they’re with a parent or without one.

Being a public health servant, I’ve sworn my life to protect the safety and health of all Ohioans, and that goes for what I do in my night-life or weekends as well. I’ve done many shows and book readings to children over the years for churches like Hillard United Methodist, Bethel International United Methodists, the Hilliard Pride Festival, and many others, and I was wearing more clothing than I or any of you are wearing today. Fully covered with 7 layers of undergarments, a dress that went from my neck to my shoes, and a wig. These types of shows or opportunities for people to interact with a performer are chosen by the parents. The parents have a right to decide whether or not they want their children to be in these spaces, which are safe, have rules, regulations, and expectations of performers, and which are taken seriously by the performers and the venues.

Drag is an art form and the First Amendment expression of my artistry — something that I don’t always get to showcase in my daily work life. It’s a creative outlet for me to create another character who luckily also has a voice and a purpose in my community to speak out when I see injustice, inequality, and discrimination. The drag community has never tried to harm juveniles; we support parents who want to introduce their children to the people that are in their community and do it in a respectful and positive manner. We do not want to make anyone uncomfortable and would never want to be obscene or perform in a manner that would be deemed that way. Most of us have normal 9-5 jobs and just want to bring a little fun, beauty, and sparkle into the world.

The Republican Party has traditionally been about less government involvement with the daily lives of individuals and freedom of expression. That is what Drag is and if someone doesn’t want to have drag around them, they do not need to attend an event with Drag Queens. But making a law to ban it takes rights away from parents and individuals who do and that is not justice

or following the history of what government was created for. In this time of inflation, unaffordable housing, groceries, gas, electricity, and multiple issues at home and abroad I can think of many other issues that need this body's attention, rather than creating an additional law to combat something that is already illegal in the Ohio Revised Code. I urge you all to vote no against this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, I can now answer any questions you may have.