

Hello, my name is Angela Edgemon, and I am a cosplayer living in Columbus, Ohio. That means I dress up in beautiful, silly, terrifying, and hilarious costumes at conventions where I hang out with my friends and nerd out over pop culture. Cosplay is a way for people to express other sides of themselves, and to celebrate the video games, tv shows, and comics that bring them joy. One day I can throw a bald cap on and dress up as Pitbull and run around like a goofball. The next day I can slip into a floor-length dress, put on a wig and fangs, and become a vampire goddess.

At nearly every convention, there's a costume contest for folks to perform and show off their mastery of making costumes and wigs. For many contests, you win when you fully embrace the character's personality – when you get into character and put on a good show for the crowd. There are no rules on who or what you can dress up as. In fact, being able to turn yourself into someone completely different – a different gender, a different age, painting your entire body blue, making yourself appear 3 feet taller – is a sign of great skill. It is art.

There are usually children at conventions, and at these costume contests. Sometimes they're even performing alongside their family or friends. That's because we already have public indecency laws, and they are protected from seeing obscene costumes here. There are 18+ only panels, and security checking IDs and making sure costumes follow guidelines.

Not once have I mentioned drag queens. But I recognize that the line between cosplay and drag doesn't exist. The vague and overbroad language presented in this bill makes me wonder in shame – will you criminalize these cosplay contests, too? Where Sarah can perform and win as Master Chief if she wants, and Chris and his frat bros can lip sync as Sailor Moon and the scouts?

HB 249 attacks a specific community by attacking us all and poses a serious threat to our first amendment rights. It sets a dangerous precedent for what it means to be free in this state and country.

Reject HB 249.