

H.B.249 Opposing Testimony

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and esteemed members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is Leo Rodriguez, and I am here today to urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to oppose House Bill 249.

While framed around protecting our children, this bill deliberately uses vague language to criminalize Drag Performances. An art form that is celebrated across cultures and recognized as a legitimate form of expression. An art form that it's protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

The language in this bill is dangerous. By categorizing gender-expressive performance as inherently adult or inappropriate for minors, this bill encodes discrimination into Ohio law. It sends a clear message: that people whose gender expression falls outside conventional norms are a threat to our children.

That is not a values statement, that is prejudice. And when a legislature writes prejudice into law, it doesn't protect children. It teaches them that some of their neighbors, their family members, and perhaps even themselves are something to be feared and hidden away.

Ohio already has robust obscenity laws. If a performance is genuinely obscene, prosecutors have every tool they need under current statute. This bill solves a problem that does not exist, while creating a framework that can and will be weaponized against the LGBTQ community. All of it, at taxpayer expense.

What our Children actually need are fully funded public schools. They need access to libraries where books are not pulled from shelves because of political pressure. They need teachers who are empowered to educate, not censored by ideology. They need a state that invests in their futures rather than manufacturing culture war battles to distract from the real work of governance. That is what protecting children looks like.

Ohio is already in a battle for talent, for young people, for families who have choices about where to build their lives. Bills like H.B. 249 are exactly the kind of legislation that inform those decisions. Young professionals, educators, healthcare workers, entrepreneurs; the people Ohio needs most will look at this bill and choose to build their lives somewhere else.

Our growth as a state is dependent on people choosing Ohio as a place of opportunity. Legislation that signals Ohio is hostile to people who are different does the opposite of welcoming. Members of this committee, I urge you: do not move this bill forward. Your constituents sent you here to make their lives better, to fund their schools, to grow their economy, to build a state where everyone can thrive. This bill does none of that. And it will contribute to the very decline Ohio is already working so hard to reverse.

We can choose to be better than this. Please vote no on H.B. 249. Thank you.