

Dear Mr. Chairman and Esteemed Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB249, the proposed age restriction on drag performance and perceived transgender performance bill. This bill defines any drag performances or performing while transgender as “obscene.” There is nothing “obscene” about drag as an art form. Was it obscene when the male contemporaries of Shakespeare performed female roles in his plays? Is it obscene when we watch John Travolta perform as Tracy Turnblad’s mother in the movie version of the musical Hairspray? I think we all know the answer to these questions is a resounding no. Personally, I wasn’t alive during the time of Shakespeare, but I can tell you that when Hairspray was in theatres I saw it in a packed movie theatre in the middle of the Bible Belt. There was no picketing or rioting. No one cared that there was a featured drag performance in the film. In fact, it was celebrated.

Drag performances around Ohio and the world are very similar to the performances I previously referenced. They are exaggerations and celebrations of femininity. They are artistic reimaginings of what it means to be masculine. Drag performances are art and drag performers are artists. They spend countless hours perfecting their craft. They are not inherently obscene because they imagine femininity and masculinity differently than the sponsors of this bill. Like all art, if it doesn’t reach you, it isn’t for you. In the past it would have been considered reasonable for the sponsors of this bill to say “this isn’t for me” about drag and direct their attention elsewhere. Now, the sponsors and like-minded individuals have become so sensitive that they must legislate art they dislike out of existence.

In fact, if you look into the legislative history of the sponsors of this bill you will see that they have attempted to legislate genders they dislike out of existence as well. There is nothing inherently obscene about being transgender, and yet the sponsors propose making performing while transgender a felony in this bill. Does this sound hyperbolic? Unfortunately, due to the broad language in this bill transgender people could be charged with a felony for performing while presenting as themselves. I do not say this as a bystander on the sidelines. I am transgender. I am non-binary and because I take testosterone I present as male. I sing tenor in my community choir and I regularly perform in my community theatre summer musical. If this bill became law I would be risking criminal prosecution every time I performed with my choir or theatre company.

We all know what the thinly veiled purpose of this bill is. It is not to protect children. It is not to shield vulnerable populations from obscenity. The purpose of this bill is to limit the livelihoods of drag performers, shrink the public lives of transgender people, and bankrupt the queer spaces we frequent. I implore the committee to vote against this bill.