

Annie Mackowick
3/18/2026

Testimony on Ohio House Bill 249

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 249. My name is Annie Mackowick. I am here today as a proud Ohio resident of over a decade, a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community, and a proud, passionate, lifelong patron of the arts. I am also here as an advocate for our talented, vibrant, and thriving drag community here in Columbus and by extension all of Ohio.

My journey with the arts in all forms started at a young age. I was in dance class by age three, singing along, as best I could, to the radio on the drives there each week. Musicals were the obvious next step for my developing mind bursting at the seams to perform and express myself. When the High School Musical craze hit my middle school, I didn't question my casting as Coach Bolton, Troy Bolton's Dad, because I'd be playing a boy, but rather because I really wanted to sing "Bop to the Top" as Sharpay Evans. Nevertheless, when I danced my little heart out to "We're All in This Together", the show's finale, alongside my friends with my ponytail tucked into a baseball hat, I joined the long legacy of gender-nonconforming actors that goes back ages. From the silver screens of Golden Age Hollywood, to Shakespeare's Globe theater, the Theatrons of Ancient Greece, and beyond. Gender-nonconforming performances aren't new or radical, it's human and preserves across many forms of entertainment, including drag.

Drag, like every artistic expression, is protected by the first amendment. Again and again, courts have upheld that the government does not have the right to regulate how citizens publicly express themselves even if some do not find it to their own personal tastes. Proponents say that this bill is a safeguard for children against public performances deemed inappropriate, yet law already exists prohibiting such acts as seen in the Ohio Revised Code Section 2907.31. All HB 249 does is empower the government to police culture, art, and our constitutional right to freedom of expression.

Outside of my day job, I work the door at District West, the premier drag performance space in Columbus, and every shift I see how the art of drag unites, inspires, and uplifts every individual in the audience and on stage, from all walks of life. Patrons tell me all the time that District West is the only place they can be their full, authentic selves, but they don't even need to tell me because I can see it in how they set their shoulders, dance unapologetically, and laugh loudly with their head thrown back, eyes closed. I see it in our performers in how they grow to their full height on stage with a confidence that's infectious and a voice that rings. The love and joy that

fills that room is so powerful. It's life changing, it's life saving, and it's a light that will never be diminished.

If you remember nothing else from my testimony, remember these 3 key points. First, gender-nonconforming performance art has not just existed for centuries, but been resoundingly celebrated, it does not deserve criminalization. Second, measures are already in place that this bill claims to provide, making it redundant and unnecessary. Third and finally, the government does not have the right to supersede the very first amendment of our constitution. Therefore, I urge you to vote against HB 249.

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