

## **Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Ohio House Judiciary Committee,**

My name is Nick Post. I'm from Columbus, Ohio. I am here today because this bill is being presented as a way to protect children, and I want to talk about what protecting children actually looked like in my life. I keep hearing examples like the testimony from a woman in Xenia, the wife of a pastor, who said she was scared of a transgender woman in a locker room. She hid in a stall, and when she came out, that person was gone. No one was harmed. And I want to be very clear: fear is not harm. That story did not show danger. It showed that a transgender person was existing, bothering no one, and left. And yet we are building legislation around the assumption that they will do something. Why do we assume that?

Because when we look at Ohio, and we look at the examples being brought forward, what are we actually seeing? We are seeing complaints about a drag queen twerking at a legal, community-sponsored drag event, a drag performer wearing a skimpy outfit, and a transgender person in a bathroom. No children harmed. No crimes committed. Just discomfort. And I think it is important to say this clearly: just because a few loud voices in a community are offended does not mean everyone in that community feels the same way. There are people in these same towns who support drag, who attend these events, and who are not bothered at all. So if this bill is about protecting children from potential harm, I need to ask a harder question: where is the actual harm happening?

Because I can tell you where it happened to me. From kindergarten through twelfth grade in Vandalia, Ohio, I was bullied relentlessly. And one of the worst places I experienced harassment, assault, and fear was in the school locker room. A place where we were forced, as children, to get undressed in front of each other, in a confined space, often in just our underwear, by two straight teachers nearby who were able to walk in at any moment. I never understood why that policy was enforced. I was always scared to change my clothes, but we were told to do it, so we just accepted it.

And what happened in that space was not hypothetical. It was real. Boys would call me fag, flamer, sissy, gay. They would come up and pull on parts of my body. They would try to prod me from behind with objects. And it was brushed off as "boys being boys." There was a moment in eighth grade, right before the last day of school, where two boys cornered me in that locker room and attacked me. And when it was reported, I was punished with detention and it was labeled as a fight. That is what "protection" looked like for me.

So I have to ask again: if we are writing laws about the potential for abuse, why aren't the representatives for this bill including a part where we address the documented history of abuse in churches? Why aren't the representatives for this bill including a part where we address priests and authority figures who have harmed children? Why aren't the representatives for this bill including a part where we address cases of child exploitation found on computers of people in positions of trust? Why aren't the representatives for this bill including a part where we address the Boy Scouts of America and decades of reports of young boys being abused? Why aren't the

representatives for this bill including a part where we address college campuses, where alcohol, power dynamics, and lack of accountability have led to countless cases of assault against young women? Why aren't the representatives of this bill speaking out more loudly to release the Epstein files, where real children were trafficked, potentially just up the road from here in the suburbs of Columbus by the wealthy?

Because those are not hypothetical. Those are documented. Those are real. And yet instead, we are here talking about a group of people that lawmakers have to search for rare examples of wrongdoing to justify regulating.

And I want to bring it back to that locker room, because the boys who harassed me, in some cases, were the same boys who later approached me in private, boys who were struggling with their own identities, boys who projected their fear, their confusion, and their shame onto me, a kid who had no power to defend himself.

And when my mother finally found out what I had gone through, after years of me hiding it, the school system did not protect me. The principal looked her in the eye and said that kids did not call other kids gay, that I was bringing attention to myself. So when I hear that this bill is about protecting children, I have to ask: which children? Because it has always been the kids who are different, gay kids, trans kids, gender-nonconforming kids, and even the kids who simply stand beside them, who experience the very harm this bill claims to prevent. And now we are being told that those same people are the threat, that they are inherently inappropriate, that their existence is something children need to be protected from.

That is not protection. That is projection. It is adults taking their own discomfort, their own unresolved fears around gender and identity, and placing that onto other people. And instead of addressing real, documented sources of harm, we are redirecting attention to a micro-minority that already experiences disproportionate levels of violence.

And I want to ask one more question, flipping this logic back for a moment. If a drag performer or a transgender person is harassed, assaulted, or targeted by someone outside of that community, by a straight person or someone not in drag, where is the protection for them in this bill? If this legislation is truly about preventing harm, why does it only move in one direction? Why is there no provision that acknowledges that they, too, can be victims? Because if we are serious about safety, it should apply to everyone.

So I will ask you this plainly: if we are comfortable ignoring the places where harm is well-documented, schools, churches, institutions, campuses, why are we so quick to legislate against people where the harm is hypothetical? Why is the assumption that they are the villain?

Because to me, that is not evidence-based policy. That is prejudice. Drag is an art form. It is expression. It is joy, satire, reflection, and survival. And no reasonable person performing drag is attempting to harm children. The idea that there is some hidden agenda is not grounded in reality. It is fueled by fear, misinformation, and internet conspiracy. Meanwhile, cities like Columbus

have built thriving arts communities where drag, performance, and creative expression contribute to culture, economy, and identity.

So I will end where I began, with that kid in the locker room, hiding, unprotected, in a system that told him the harm he experienced wasn't real. Do not make that mistake again. Do not misidentify the threat. Do not pass a law based on fear of drag artists or trans people while ignoring where harm actually exists. And if you're looking for where the real harm is being done, the call seems to be coming from inside the House... the Ohio House.

Thank you.