

House Bill 245 represents a direct infringement on the First Amendment rights of Ohioans. The freedom of expression—particularly through clothing, performance, and artistic identity—is a protected constitutional right. This bill does not simply affect the LGBTQ+ community; it creates a chilling effect across multiple industries, artistic professions, and economic sectors throughout Ohio.

Beyond its constitutional concerns, House Bill 245 poses a measurable threat to Ohio's economy.

1. Impact on Performing Arts and Entertainment Industry

The language of this bill is overly broad and would directly impact performers such as clowns, mimes, actors, and entertainers whose work often involves costuming that challenges or plays with gender norms.

For example, clowns frequently use exaggerated or nontraditional gender presentation as part of their act. Female clowns wearing traditionally male clothing—such as suit jackets, ties, or oversized shoes—are not making political statements; they are participating in a long-standing artistic tradition. Similarly, mimes often wear stylized, androgynous costumes that blur gender lines.

Ohio's arts and culture sector contributes **billions of dollars annually** to the state economy. According to national data from organizations like Americans for the Arts, the nonprofit arts and culture industry generates over **\$150 billion in economic activity nationwide**, supporting millions of jobs. Restrictive laws that create legal uncertainty for performers will discourage productions, reduce bookings, and ultimately cost Ohio jobs and tax revenue.

2. Economic Loss from Cosplay and Convention Tourism

Ohio hosts numerous conventions and fan events that attract thousands of visitors each year. Events like Cincinnati Comic Expo and Colossalcon bring in attendees from across the Midwest and beyond.

Cosplay—the act of dressing as fictional characters—is a central part of these events. It is common and widely accepted for individuals to portray characters of a different gender. Under House Bill 245, these participants could be placed at legal risk simply for engaging in expressive fandom.

The financial implications are significant:

- Conventions generate **millions of dollars in local economic impact** through hotel stays, restaurant spending, transportation, and retail purchases.

- A single mid-sized convention can bring in **\$5–15 million** in regional revenue over a weekend.
- Attendees often spend hundreds of dollars per trip on costumes, materials, and travel.

If even a fraction of these visitors choose to avoid Ohio due to legal concerns, the state will lose substantial tourism revenue. Businesses—especially small businesses—will bear the brunt of this loss.

3. Threat to Theater, Education, and Cultural Tradition

Cross-gender casting has been a foundational element of theater for centuries. A well-known example is Mary Martin, whose portrayal of Peter Pan became iconic. Under the broad implications of this bill, such performances could be criminalized.

This is not hypothetical—it directly affects:

- School plays and university theater programs
- Community theaters across Ohio
- Professional productions that rely on creative casting

Ohio’s creative economy includes thousands of educators, students, and performers. Restricting artistic expression will discourage productions, reduce ticket sales, and harm educational opportunities tied to the arts.

4. Tourism Decline and Broader Economic Consequences

When states pass laws perceived as discriminatory, there is clear historical precedent for economic backlash. Following the passage of laws such as North Carolina House Bill 2, that state lost an estimated **\$3.7 billion in economic activity** due to canceled events, business relocations, and tourism declines.

Ohio risks similar consequences.

Travel decisions are increasingly influenced by perceptions of safety and inclusivity. If Ohio becomes known for restrictive or discriminatory laws:

- Conferences, concerts, and sporting events may relocate
- Corporations may reconsider expansion or relocation
- Tourists may choose more welcoming destinations

This results in reduced revenue for:

- Hotels
- Restaurants
- Gas stations
- Retail businesses

Even a modest decline in tourism—just **5–10%**—could translate into **hundreds of millions of dollars in lost economic activity annually.**

Conclusion

House Bill 245 is not just a social issue—it is an economic one. It threatens:

- Constitutional freedoms under the First Amendment
- The stability of Ohio’s arts and entertainment industries
- Tourism and convention revenue
- Ohio’s reputation as a welcoming and economically competitive state

Policies that restrict expression do not strengthen our communities—they isolate them and drive economic opportunity elsewhere.

For the sake of Ohio’s economy, workforce, and constitutional integrity, I strongly urge opposition to House Bill 245.