

March 16, 2026

Representative Jim Thomas,
Chair of House Judicial Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 S. High St
Columbus, OH 43215

My name is Ashlynn Riddick, I am a 17 year old junior at Kent Roosevelt Highschool. I want to thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 249. As a member of the community you represent, and a part of the minority this bill claims to protect, I implore you to appeal to the historical implications that bills such as House Bill 249 hold. I oppose this bill because it goes against the lessons history has taught us and includes language that maintains a lack of specification that reflects a lack of completion upon the proposed bill.

I wanted to provide my testimony as an alternative perspective to those presented by the sponsors of House Bill 249, as well as to clarify the position of many in the opposition to the passing of this bill.

I . The Historical Implications

The language used by House Bill 249 is intentional not just in its formality to appeal to this committee and beyond, but to villainise targets of this bill, namely drag performers. Phrasing such as the language used in section B(4) exemplifies this:

(4) Expose the person's private parts with the purpose of personal sexual arousal or gratification or to lure the minor into sexual activity.

The specific language use of “lure” by Representatives King and Williams is not minor, it is an intentional phrase with historical implications, especially in combination with section 4(a)(v):

(v) Performers or entertainers who exhibit a gender identity that is different from the performer's or entertainer's biological sex using clothing, makeup, prosthetic or imitation genitals or breasts, or other physical markers;

This rhetoric, in combination with the description of gender non-conforming entertainers, is meant to inherently associate drag performances with sexual activity, an interpretation that is not only not based in reality but reflects rhetoric from the first lavender scare. During that time, the banning of public drag performances was framed as a protective measure in service of the public, yet the banning of queer performance allowed for public beatings and executions of queer people in many states including Ohio because the government's choice to ban a free expression of experience lead to stigma and eventual hate. While I choose to believe Representative King and Williams have not thought of this ultimate result in the pursuit of their goal, it is the historically proven result of banning queer performance in public spaces, and instead of adapting to modern times representative King and Williams have chosen to pursue the ill- thought out repetition of the past.

II . Unclear Language

The language used within House Bill 249 is unclear in its definitions, which makes an informed ruling impossible. Section 4(b) exemplifies this:

(b) As used in division (A)(4)(a) of this section, "biological sex" means the biological indication of male and female, including sex chromosomes, naturally occurring sex hormones, gonads, and nonambiguous internal and external genitalia present at birth, without regard to an individual's psychological, chosen, or subjective experience of gender.

The inclusion of language such as “Chosen gender” when the science behind gender identity has been repeatedly proven to be more complex than a simple choice is enough to discount the reasoning for the entirety of this bill. C E Roselli found in 2018 that gender identity shapes the development of the brain, not only that, but there are many people who, at birth, were not assigned the biological designation of male or female, and as the bill is currently written it makes no room for individuals who were assigned intersex at birth, regardless of their gender identity. The language of the bill is unclear and not factually supported, inherently removing its grounds for proposal. If a bill cannot be interpreted properly and applied equally it should not be allowed to become a law.

I appreciate your willingness to hear my testimony and concerns today, and hope you continue to consider the historical implications as well as the lack of clear language within House Bill 249.

Thank you,

Ashlynn Riddick