

March 17, 2026

Dear Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and fellow respected Committee Members:

I moved my family to Ohio in 2014 because I was looking for a great place to raise kids. I'm a middle-aged mom of three, a MLIS-degreed librarian, and in addition to the countless classic library story hours that I've attended since my oldest was in diapers, my children began going to drag story times in 2019 - our first was hosted by the wonderful Nina West. She was funny. She was silly. She had huge hair and a voluminous pink gown and the children were enthralled - not only because she was a radiant vision of cotton candy come alive (which she was!) but because she was a great reader.

I don't know if you've ever met a child before, but they love funny and silly and big, huge hair. One of my children also enjoys performing in an inclusive local dance troupe, where she performs with all manner of magical beings including, yes, drag performers - and the only thing it has changed about her is that she knows more about wig glue than the average middle-schooler. One of my children plays football and basketball and he loves to be read to, although he could really care less about what the reader is wearing - as long as they do the voices. Nina does the voices! Inclusive family programming has educational merit - and if you think drag performance for all-age audiences is a new phenomenon, have I got news for you about Shakespeare!

While we're on the topic of classic literature, in a world where YouTube and AI slop and endless scrolling consume the attention spans of children and adults alike, I would think we'd want to *encourage* kids to engage with books. Like all story hours, a drag story hour creates familiarity with the alphabet, builds book-handling skills, expands vocabulary, and is, irrefutably, a darn good time - but more importantly, it offers, in the words of The Ohio State University's own professor emerita Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, both mirrors and windows: children see the diversity of their world reflected back at them, and imagine new worlds altogether. Within this magical intersection of self-awareness and empathy, inclusive family programs create opportunities for families of all flavors to engage in conversations about justice and equity.

Simply put: being read aloud to by someone who defies expectations of gender performance flexes our empathy muscles. We could all use more of that these days, don't you agree? However, if you're opposed to the concept of teaching empathy, perhaps we can agree that I have a right to teach my own children about the values that I deem important. House Bill 249 proposes to remove the right of parents to choose for themselves what kind of programming their children attend - and is written so broadly as to put anyone under the microscope for their gender presentation, including not only the trans and intersex people that I personally know and love, but the cis-gendered women in your life that prefer overalls to skirts.

The impossible argument that a law can practically define "transgender performance" and then enforce that slippery definition is also a tired one - HB245 from last year was nearly identical, and it failed. There are already strong legal precedents like the Miller Test to help define when content is obscene, and there are already state and federal laws in place to protect children from obscenities - but it would appear that Ohio legislators are not interested in respecting legal precedent, preferring instead to spend taxpayer money in endless legal battles in a futile attempt to re-invent the morality wheel, while everyday citizens are struggling to buy groceries and put gas in the tank.

This bill isn't just bad for parents like me and for free speech - it's bad for business. Even if you don't enjoy going to the theatre, you - and your constituents - likely *do* enjoy the thriving commerce in your downtown and neighborhood districts because of it. House Bill 249 chills the performing arts industry statewide, injures beloved local businesses, and harms the local traditions - and local economies - centered around Pride and drag performance, hitting the state of Ohio squarely in the pocketbook.

Say no to House Bill 249 - if you can't do it for families like mine that have a right to the educational programming they enjoy, do it for the businesses you represent and the commercial markets that you impact with your legislation.

Sincerely,

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