

March 18, 2026

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for allowing testimony today on HB 249. My name is Liam Strausbaugh and I am testifying in opposition to HB 249 on behalf of NASW Ohio.

HB 249 is yet another attack on LGBTQ+ Ohioans shrouded under the guise of protecting children. The sponsors of HB 249 have expressed that the bill seeks to close a gap in Ohio's indecent exposure laws and add additional protections for Ohio youth. This is untrue. Ohio's laws already cover that any performances that are obscene are already illegal – HB 249 does nothing to alter that. What HB 249 *does* do is create an additional layer of subjectivity regarding content.

HB 249 would not only apply in locations where children *are* present, but rather where children ***may be*** present. While children *usually* aren't present in bars or similar venues, there are often special circumstances or events in which minors *may be* present in those establishments. Should a venue or performer even take reasonable, precautionary steps to ensure that there are no minors present, the venue and/or performer can **still be found in violation of this bill should a minor enter the premises without their knowledge.**

As HB 249 also includes language limiting “other similar performers or entertainers who provide entertainment that appeals to a prurient interest” with no real definition, the bill's vague language can be applied to a broad array of performances with varying subjectivity and discretion.

Drag is an art form. It is individual and political expression. It is not inherently evil, vile, sexual, or inappropriate. There are of course individual performances that are, but drag as a whole is not obscene. Performances (of any kind) that are obscene are already illegal for children to be present for. HB 249 is not doing anything to protect children that current Ohio law doesn't cover – it simply attacks LGBTQ+ Ohioans.

We ask that you VOTE NO on HB 249.

Thank you,

Liam Strausbaugh