

## **Written Opponent Testimony on HB 249**

### **Ohio House Judiciary Committee**

**March 17, 2026**

#### **Submitted by:**

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#### **Constituent from Lancaster, Ohio**

Members of the Ohio House Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to Ohio House Bill 249.

My name is Nicholas Herold. I serve as the Lead 2-1-1 Specialist at Fairfield County 2-1-1, where I connect individuals and families to essential health and human services, including mental health and crisis resources. I also represent the Fairfield County Suicide Prevention Coalition and serve as Board President of the Rainbow Alliance of Fairfield County.

#### **Summary of Concerns**

While I appreciate that HB 249 is intended to protect minors, I am concerned that, as written, it will have unintended consequences that negatively impact mental health, create uncertainty for community organizations, and harm local economic activity.

#### **Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Impact**

Through my work with 2-1-1 and coordination with crisis programs, including the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, I regularly support individuals experiencing acute distress.

LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly youth, are already at higher risk for depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. A key driver of this risk is stigma and lack of supportive environments.

Legislation that restricts forms of expression associated with LGBTQ+ communities can contribute to that stigma. From a public health perspective, this matters. When individuals feel unwelcome or targeted, they are less likely to seek help and more likely to experience isolation, both of which increase the risk of crisis.

#### **Broad Language and Implementation Concerns**

HB 249 introduces restrictions on “adult cabaret performances,” but the definitions are broad and open to interpretation. This raises concerns that:

- Family-friendly, non-sexual events may be unintentionally impacted

- Enforcement may vary across jurisdictions
- Organizations may face uncertainty in determining compliance

Clear and precise language is critical in legislation. As written, this bill creates ambiguity that could affect both individuals and community organizations.

### **Impact on Community Events and Local Economy**

As Board President of the Rainbow Alliance of Fairfield County, I help organize the annual Pride festival in Lancaster. This event is a family-friendly, community-centered festival that includes local vendors, resource organizations, and live entertainment, including drag performances appropriate for a general audience.

This event serves as both a vital community resource and an economic driver. It brings visitors into the area and supports local businesses, restaurants, and vendors.

HB 249 creates uncertainty around whether events like ours could continue as planned due to the inclusion of drag performers. The potential impact includes reduced tourism and local spending, loss of revenue for small businesses and vendors, and cancellation or scaling back of an established community event.

In addition to economic consequences, limiting this event would remove an important space for connection and support.

### **Broader Public Health Considerations**

Ohio has made meaningful investments in crisis response and prevention, including expanding access to services through 988 and local systems. These efforts emphasize reducing stigma, increasing access to care, and strengthening community-based supports.

Policies that may increase stigma or limit inclusive, supportive spaces are counterproductive to these goals and may ultimately increase demand on crisis systems.

### **Conclusion**

While the goal of protecting minors is shared, Ohio House Bill 249 as written risks:

- Increasing stigma for vulnerable populations
- Creating uncertainty in enforcement
- Undermining mental health and suicide prevention efforts
- Negatively impacting local communities and economies

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose HB 249.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

