



The Honorable Jim Thomas  
Chair House Judiciary Committee, State of Ohio  
Ohio State Capitol  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

The Honorable D.J. Swearingen  
Vice Chair House Judiciary Committee, State of Ohio  
Ohio State Capitol  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

The Honorable Eric Synenberg  
Ranking Member House Judiciary Committee, State of Ohio  
Ohio State Capitol  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

March 25, 2026

Re: Woodhull Freedom Foundation Opposition to HB249 “Enact the Indecent Exposure Modernization Act”

Dear Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and Members of the Ohio House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Ricci Levy. I am the President and CEO of the [Woodhull Freedom Foundation](http://WoodhullFreedomFoundation.org), a national human rights organization. As a representative of Woodhull and in my capacity as an expert on the human right to sexual freedom, I am writing to you and your fellow members of the House Judiciary Committee today to express our strong opposition to Ohio to [HB249](#).

HB249 seeks to impose harsh criminal penalties against adult performers and creates a new concept of "adult cabaret performance" that includes performances featuring performers exhibiting a gender identity different from their biological sex. This bill specifically targets drag performances and creates new criminal penalties for performances in public spaces or locations where a minor could view them. As written, this bill is overly broad. This bill unduly categorizes all drag performances under the same banner, conflating performances for adult audiences with those developed with age-appropriate content intended for children.

In your capacity as a member of the House Judiciary Committee, we at Woodhull urge you to recognize how HB249 is, in fact, a public safety threat. Since drag performances became a target in state legislatures across the country, [we have spoken out against them](#) because they undermine American values and one of the most basic principles of American society: [free speech](#). HB249 and bills like them violate the First Amendment, which protects “[expressive content](#)” and “[symbolic speech](#).” By codifying restrictions on free speech, HB249 makes

drag performers targets for arrest and potentially dangerous interactions with law enforcement. This bill and those like it also have the potential to embolden public animosity against drag performers, further eroding public safety.

At Woodhull, we are tracking bills and legislation like this, which target the LGBTQ+ community and are part of broader societal and political attacks on LGBTQ+ people. This assault includes myriad attacks by the White House as enshrined in several Executive Orders which erase transgender, nonbinary, and gender expansive people from public life and falsely treats sex as a fixed male and female binary, direct federal agencies to impede young people's access to lifesaving gender-affirming healthcare, and ban trans women and girls from competing on sports teams that align with their gender. The targeting of trans people is so dire that the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security has warned that policies targeting transgender people in the United States are indicative of [the early stages of genocide](#).

Our opposition to HB693 is informed by this wide sweeping assault on LGBTQ+ people and sexual freedom more broadly and by irrefutable facts about [sexual orientation](#) and [gender identity](#), which we have exhaustively researched as part of our [Fact Checked by Woodhull](#) series. In this series, we address the reality that [LGBTQ+ people are not a public danger but instead are in danger](#) of harassment, discrimination, and violence, with current laws not sufficiently protecting LGBTQ+ people's rights. We also address [the truth about gender and sex](#) which is not reflected in the bill you are considering today. This includes the fact that restrictive binary categories of gender and sex cause serious harm by excluding and shaming anyone who exists outside of these lines, especially transgender and intersex people.

We at Woodhull stand firm in our defense of Constitutionally protected free speech. As you and your fellow House Judiciary Committee members hold a hearing on HB249 today, we urge you also to consider the free speech protections under threat if the bill moves forward. We urge you and your colleagues, as lawmakers, to ensure the equal protection of all Ohioans before the law and reject HB249.

Your consideration of these matters is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,



Ricci Joy Levy  
President & CEO  
Woodhull Freedom Foundation