

Testimony in Opposition to HB 476
Ohio House Committee on Government Accountability & Oversight
May 3, 2016 | Columbus, OH

My name is Josie Setzler. I am a retired chemistry professor living in Fremont, OH. I am a member of Tiffin Area Pax Christi, a group affiliated with Pax Christi USA under the umbrella of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Boycott and divestment are key tools in the use of nonviolence to address oppression and human rights violations. Members of Tiffin Area Pax Christi recognize and honor the long history of boycott in the American political tradition. That tradition goes back at least as far as the 1773 Boston Tea Party, the culmination of a political protest campaign that featured the boycott of British tea. Examples from the more recent past include boycotts in support of civil rights and farmworker rights. Many American institutions participated in the divestment movement that brought an end to South African apartheid. In a lesser known example, Jewish groups joined forces in 1933 to boycott Nazi goods. Most of these campaigns were controversial in their day, yet time has borne out their value for fostering human rights and the democratic tradition that we cherish.

In recent years, these same tools are being used on behalf of justice for Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. It is not the job of the state of Ohio to conduct foreign affairs nor should it interfere with the role of the President and the US Congress in these matters. The President and Congress are answerable to the American people, and the people's right to political expression should not be crippled by the state of Ohio.

Our group's members belong to several churches that have taken public stands in support of the BDS campaign, including the United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church. We look to the example and teaching of these churches as we form our consciences and find our own means to express our convictions.

Our group has been pleased to work with the organization Jewish Voice for Peace when we have hosted conferences to explore the brutal realities that Palestinians endure in daily life under the Israeli occupation. Their website states:

Jewish Voice for Peace endorses the call from Palestinian civil society for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) as part of our work for freedom, justice and equality for all people. We believe that the time-honored, non-violent tools proposed by the BDS call provide powerful opportunities to make that vision real.

Later in the group's statement, Jewish Voice for Peace declares:

By endorsing the call, we make our hope real and our love visible and we claim our own liberation as bound with the liberation of all.

Their words of hope, love, and liberation resonate with our Christian faith tradition and strengthen our commitment to the BDS campaign.

Tiffin Area Pax Christi values both the political and faith traditions that inform and animate the current BDS campaign. We strongly recommend that this committee vote no on House Bill 476.