

Testimony for Hany Baransi

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Ohio House of Representatives Legislative Committee on Government Accountability and Oversight

Hello, my name is Hany Baransi. I own the Nazareth Restaurant here in Columbus. I am a proud Ohioan, Arab, and Israeli.

The uncompromising economic and political warfare against Israel advocated by supporters of BDS will, if implemented, have a profoundly negative impact on American workers and American companies.

The eight states that have already passed similar legislation – Illinois, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Indiana, Colorado, and Arizona – **conduct annual trade with Israel worth \$1.1 billion**. Given that **one in five American jobs is dependent on foreign trade**, implementing a boycott of Israel will harm Americans alongside those Israeli companies and institutions unfairly targeted. Additionally, boycotts of Israel will **stunt the economic growth** that trade with Israel brings. **Ohio alone exported \$223,070,046 worth of goods to Israel in 2015. We should be working to strengthen these ties and bolster economic growth.** There is great potential for Ohio and Israel connecting in more R&D and business opportunities.

American taxpayers don't want to fund any kind of discrimination. This legislation ensures that companies and institutions that discriminate against Israelis through the BDS hate campaign will be ineligible for state contracts.

The BDS hate campaign wants to block Israeli companies from conducting business in the US, prevent Israeli academics from cooperating with American universities, and stop Israeli artists from performing at American venues. **Any and every Israeli, whether Jewish or Arab, is a target for the boycott.**

Implementation of the boycott means engaging in **illegal discrimination** on the basis of nationality. The Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act of 2015, signed into law by President Obama, protects Israel and other countries from unjustified boycotts by **prohibiting discrimination in government contracts**. Additionally, there is pending bipartisan federal legislation, sponsored by Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) in the Senate, and Juan Vargas (D-CA) and Bob Dold (R-IL) in the House. This bill, aptly named the “Combating BDS Act of 2016,” aims to protect state and local governments’ **right to withdraw** their pension funds and contracts from entities that boycott, divest, or sanction Israel.

Lastly, the claim that the anti-BDS legislation restricts First Amendment rights is a malicious falsehood.

While BDS is rightly regarded as hate speech, **nothing in this legislation prohibits free speech rights.** This legislation is practical, limiting commercial transactions between states, especially Ohio, and companies or entities that engage in nationality-based discrimination. BDS activists who claim otherwise are **purposefully distorting the truth.**

Thank you for your time. I implore you to support this legislation.