

Testimony in Opposition to H.B. 476
Ohio House of Representatives
Committee on Government Accountability and Oversight

May 10, 2016

Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Clyde, and Members of the Committee:

As I address you today, I am hopeful that nothing is dearer to you than our US and Ohio constitutions as well as the people of Ohio.

My name is Reem Subei and I am an attorney from Toledo, Ohio. I am here on behalf of the Ohio National Lawyers Guild, and on behalf of all my friends, classmates, and activists, who felt too intimidated to testify here today.

The mere introduction of a bill about whether the State of Ohio will boycott its very own citizens if they choose to exercise their free speech rights has created a chilling effect on college students across the state. Numerous friends wrote to me offering to help— any the background, hidden, secret way- to defeat the bill. They did not want their names to get out because they are nervous, worried, silenced, afraid of getting on the McCarthy list this bill seeks to create.

To nobody's surprise, I've heard stories about the lobbyists that may have visited you about passing HB476, the trips you were taken on to view the bright so-called "democratic and American-like" side of Israel, and the donations you have received or are yet to receive for passing this bill- naïve as I may be, I am certain that nothing is dearer to you than the laws of our US and Ohio constitutions as well as the people of Ohio. And it is my belief that you will consult with those before you make any decision about this bill.

Before I challenge the constitutionality of the bill, let me tell you a little bit about why I am so strongly opposed to it.

Just like all the other opposers of this bill, I see in it a promotion of war crimes, massacres, human rights abuses.

Some of you might be of the opinion that Israel is innocent and undeserving of the criticism it receives from the criticism that the United Nations, the US Government, and countless other nations.

Well, so long as you reside in the United States, you are entitled to your individual opinions.

I am asking you for no more than that same exact right.

If you pass this bill, you would be robbing me of the freedom to act on the basis of my convictions. And that makes me feel a lot like I'm back in Saudi Arabia.

I forgot to tell you that after my mother gave birth to me in Indiana, my father signed a contract in Saudi Arabia and my mother joined him shortly thereafter. So I grew up in Saudi Arabia.

Growing up in Saudi, I was not entitled to our most dearly held American value: the right to free speech. For all of the 16 years of my life that I spent there, I have never seen a rally in support of Palestinian human rights, never learned of an opportunity to call on the people of Saudi to take a stance against international law violations, and never was I even permitted to have a serious discussion of the Palestinian crisis in a public setting.

We learned that common people were not to meddle with what those in power termed “controversial.” To do otherwise in that part of the world would cause unwanted consequences.

Today, you are considering a bill, actually some of who have co-sponsored a bill, that tells me I have to face dire consequences for engaging in the most American value. My right to free speech. I am told that if I choose to boycott a foreign nation, that my very own state will boycott me.

When I started law school at the University of Toledo 5 years ago, I did to promote justice and equality for all. So I chose to immerse myself in nonprofit work through advocacy for minority rights, mediations, representation of impoverished juveniles, and investigating cases of child abuse, dependency, and neglect. Thanks to HB476, I will not be able to engage in any of the aforementioned legal duties.

While, boycotts may not seem appealing to you, but they are a means of civil, peaceful, organized protest that has been tried and tested during the South African apartheid.

Actually, I will tell you a little secret, two years ago I was opposed to boycotts. In all my knowledge and awareness of the situation in Israel and Palestine, I thought that boycotting Israeli products could not benefit anyone, and will only harm both Palestinians and Israelis. It was an opinion I held and I was permitted to operate under it. Now, after spending time learning about the value and impact of boycotts throughout history, I hold a different belief. I expect to be able to exercise this belief freely and without being sanctioned by my state for the benefit of a foreign nation.

Today I am asking you to choose my best interest as a citizen of Ohio, my free speech rights, my public defender fees, my choices and decisions, over the interest of a foreign nation.

Please protect our bill of rights and do not turn our state into an unpleasant shadow of another nation.

Thank you.