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To the House Government Accountability and Oversight committee Members:

I have two major questions about HB-476, “to prohibit a state agency from contracting with a company that is boycotting Israel or disinvesting from Israel.” The first is why our state legislature is proposing this bill at this time. The second concerns the democratic nature of pre-empting any peaceful and collective citizen action.

I am curious as to what is driving this legislation. The Israeli/Palestine conflict has not provoked a recent groundswell of heated debate in the state nor is divestment a top issue of most Ohioans. Indeed, few have even heard about the divestment campaign HB-476 targets. Ohioans are far more interested in our water safety, our schools, rampant partisan politics, and whether our representatives are working to address our top issues or those of big donors. **Why then is our state legislature spending precious time pushing through a bill that is not a top state priority?** Why the focus on this ongoing conflict on the other side of the world than on our many pressing concerns right here at home? What is driving this measure? Certainly not the public, so why is it on the agenda? Furthermore, if pre-empting divestment is of such crucial importance to Ohioans, why fast-track it? Would it not be best to ensure an informed constituency first and then vote according to citizens’ educated stance on the matter?

I am particularly distressed by the anti-democratic nature of pre-empting calls to boycott or divest. Our Constitution guarantees Americans freedom of speech, yet cutting off the option of organizing boycotts or divestment effectively cuts off discussion to organize them. **I am bewildered why our own representatives would seek in any way to muzzle our speech.** Shouldn’t they instead be doing all they can to protect this right? Boycotts and divestment campaigns are peaceful grassroots initiatives, among the few options that Americans without vast wealth and influence on our own may employ collectively to protest behavior of powerful countries and companies. We have used this strategy since the colonial era, through the civil rights movement, and in conjunction with worldwide efforts to protest the unjust treatment of others. Why would any American attempt to impede citizens’ freedom of speech? I should think that one-hundred percent of our state representatives would welcome the diverse discussions that such grassroots collective actions encourage. Such **free and open debate and citizen action is -- unlike this bill -- what democracy is all about.**

I urge you to oppose HB-476. It is neither constituent-driven nor democratic in nature.

Respectfully,

Sandy Bolzenius