

Testimony in Opposition to Amended H.B. 476
Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
December 7, 2016

Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Seitz, Ranking Member Yoku, and Members of the Committee:

I am Amina Barhumi from Pickerington, OH here in opposition to the Amended H.B. 476. I come here, not because it is convenient, nor because I have extra time to pass, however, to take advantage of the opportunity provided and to relay in the strongest terms possible my disapproval and objection to our state's involvement in silencing, meddling and impeding in the efforts of individuals who wish to nonviolently protest the state of Israel's apartheid, it's occupation and it's violence and injustices against Palestinians.

I am a mother, a youth advocate and an activist. It is in my work with youth that I have found the inspiration to be audaciously truthful - first with myself and then those that surround me - to take a moral, a just and a truthful stand even if this position would mean a stand against myself, family or friends. I am here today, because it is my moral obligation to the youth that look up to me, my children that seek an example in their mother and a whole generation of young individuals, that are driven and motivated to participate civically, actively and nonviolently, but are dismayed and placed in despair when they crave to seek these visionary leaders that are willing to take a stand for justice, and often find these leaders caught up in secret alliances and foreign friendships that take precedence over true political engagement.

How do we expect a generation of young activists to engage nonviolently when brokered deals push them aside? What is their alternative? This is a serious question, and not a rhetorical one. And I ask every member of this committee to contemplate this questions seriously.

First and foremost, the amended H.B. 476 is unconstitutional and furthermore incompatible with the American political tradition and discourse. Secondly, it is important to note that this bill is an attempt to silence those that seek justice for the Palestinian people. Third this bill would align our great nation as a proponent, enabler and an encourager of human rights abuses by the state of Israel.

Boycotts have long played a significant role in our country's history. Opposing the BDS Movement, as does H.B. 476, is incompatible with the American political tradition. The United States, our very country, itself was born out of a 1774 colonial boycott of British, Irish and West Indian goods. The Montgomery bus boycott was an important milestone in the civil rights movement. Boycotts, divestment, and sanctions historically played a critical role in ending apartheid in South Africa.

Moreover, and more importantly, the US Supreme Court has ruled that companies have the right to political boycotting. The Supreme Court has held that these peaceful political boycotts are protected under the First Amendment, hence, if passed H.B. 476 violates the US Constitution in this regard.

The Boycott, Divest and Sanctions Movement (BDS Movement) is a non-violent movement to end to the the occupation and apartheid of Israel and hold it accountable for unlawful killing, use of excessive force against the Palestinians. National and state legislators who support these anti-BDS (aka HB476) are really out of step with the reality of a changing US public opinion landscape; a growing number of American, and particularly young people, support these alternative methods of protest. BDS supports these non-violent methods of resistance against violations of human rights and injustices. BDS seeks to provides hope (in a world of despair) to those that live under the continuing occupation and apartheid rule of the state to Israel. A state that has used excessive force and torture against Palestinians, detainees (including children), has illegally confiscated Palestinian land and resources by financing, developing and marketing settlements homes, and continues to build these settlements in complete and blatant disregard to their illegality (See Human Rights Watch report: Occupation Inc. and No Way To Treat A Child Report report by the Defense for Children International)

The bill is a sorry attempt to silence those that seek justice against these injustices. Without this political voice, without this tool, what is their alternative? The alternative is violence. And for those that stand before me who seek to find peace for Palestinians and Israelis - who seek to end the perpetual conflict - this bill blatantly undermines this ability.

It is a slippery slope that we take as a nation and as a state: to align ourselves with Israel's position and acceptability of these abuses. We are, and become even more so, an enabler and proponent of Israel's human right abuses against the Palestinian people. We can not have a double standard for justice: one that seeks justice only for a certain people.

For those of the younger generation, the ones that watch eagerly and enthusiastically to be heard. The youth that have chosen the right path of nonviolence, that seek and crave principled and unapologetic leadership: what will your answer be to them? I pray that you vote your conscience, and vote to have our country and our great state of Ohio be aligned with the right side of history.