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To the ^{Senate}~~House~~ Government Oversight and Reform Committee Members:

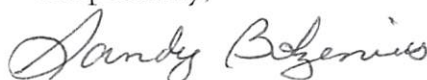
I have two major questions about HB-476 “to prohibit a state agency from contracting with a company that is boycotting Israel or disinvesting from Israel.” The first is why our state legislature is proposing this bill at this time. The second concerns the democratic nature of pre-empting any peaceful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

I am curious as to what is driving this legislation. Ohioans in general are not engaged in heated debates over the Israeli/Palestine conflict, and few have even heard about the divestment campaign HB-476 targets. Ohioans are far more interested in the safety of our water, the viability of our schools, rampant partisan politics, and whether our representatives are working to address our main issues or those of big donors. **Why then is our state legislature spending precious time pushing through a bill that is not a top priority among their constituents?** 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 a bill that would pre-empt calls to boycott or divest for a cause. Our nation’s Constitution guarantees Americans freedom of speech. This bill puts a chokehold on free speech by preventing companies from even considering a boycott or divestment from companies that they consider acting against humanity. **I am bewildered why our own representatives would seek in any way to muzzle our speech.** Shouldn’t you instead be doing all you can to protect this right? Boycotts and divestment campaigns are among the most peaceful grassroots initiatives. It brought down segregation on transportation in the U.S. and apartheid in South Africa. It is one of the few options that individual Americans without vast wealth and influence may collectively employ to protest behavior of powerful countries and companies. Why would any American, particularly our own representatives with their incumbent responsibilities to protect the Constitution, 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 – and then let the people decide. 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

