

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 10
OCTOBER 11, 2017**

**PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF GABRIEL SIRKIN
OHIO UNIVERSITY GRADUATE
PAST MEMBER
BOBCATS FOR ISRAEL**

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, and ranking member Clyde, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about my personal support for HCR 10. My name is Gabriel Sirkin. I'm a recent graduate of Ohio University, and I was one of the four Jewish students arrested at a Student Senate meeting in 2014 for trying to exercise our free speech rights guaranteed to all Americans by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

I'm not here today to explain why I support Israel or how damaging the BDS movement is. We all know about Israel's democracy, freedom, liberal values, and security needs. However, I am here today to talk about my experience with anti-Semitism and lack of free speech at Ohio University.

What happened to myself and three friends was an absolute disgrace for Ohio University and the State of Ohio. Megan Marzec, President of the Student Senate, simply used her position of power as a platform for her own agenda, to spread lies and hate across campus by vilifying and demonizing Israel. The harmful actions she committed were done so as the student body President, not just a regular student.

Not only was the Jewish Community at Ohio University hurt, but the student body in general was shocked and offended by her actions. She did not represent the views of Ohio University, yet no action was taken by the administration to remove her from office. But something had to be done as she abused her position to commit and publicize an anti-Semitic act, plain and simple.

The students came together to take a stance against her actions and demand her resignation. During Student Senate meetings, they open the floor up to students to bring up issues on campus. Members of Bobcats for Israel decided to read excerpts from messages of university presidents across the country who supported Israel, and who argued against any academic boycott of Israel. Yet we were in a room full of hate and anti-Semitism. There were over a hundred people in the room yelling, chanting, calling us names, doing anything they could to silence us. A teacher almost assaulted one of the Jewish students by getting in his face and trying to rip the paper we were reading out of his hand. The student body President called the police to remove us from the room.

We decided not to back down, and not be silent. Dozens of students yelling at the top of their lungs, just trying to silence us. We wanted to get our voices heard and would not give up until she resigned or was removed. Yet we were the ones who were removed.

The Chief of the Ohio University Police Department made the first arrest, and Becky Sebo, the President of Bobcats for Israel, was escorted out of the room in handcuffs. We thought we fully understood the risks of what could happen if we kept talking after witnessing her arrest. Yet we kept talking, and one by one, I and two other Jewish students were escorted out in handcuffs.

Never in a million years did I think anything would come from it. I thought they were taking us out to defuse the hostile situation and maybe would just force us to go home. But I didn't realize the severity of it.

They put us in the back of the police car, and drove us to the holding cell at the Ohio University Police station. We sat in this cell, with real criminals, just waiting to be let go. I'll never forget just laughing with my three other friends questioning if this was real life or not. Sitting in a cell with a creepy guy who was in there for stalking a student. We were just four Jewish kids awaiting answers of when we'll be let go. 30-40-50 minutes goes by, still sitting there just waiting for some news on what's going on. Finally we were charged with disturbing a public meeting, and we were released.

I remember calling my parents after our release. I was shocked and gut wrenched that I was literally just placed in hand cuffs, and arrested in front of hundreds of people for trying to get Megan out of office by speaking our minds as Americans. I just couldn't fathom what was going on. But in the back of my mind, I was certain the charges would be dropped. There was just no way they could charge us for this, right?

After a major uproar after our arrests, the administration still took no action. Letters and calls flooded in from students, parents, alumni, politicians, and the general public condemning Megan, condemning our arrests, and condemning our charges. Yet Meagan was still President, and we had a court date coming up.

With the support of the community, we had a great legal team behind us. Yet the District Attorney would not drop the charges. I could not believe they wouldn't drop the charges after everything that happened. Not only that, but even though this was a misdemeanor, we faced jail time for our actions. I was in awe that we actually needed to go to court to fight this. I had to miss classes for court and attorney meetings. Our faces were all over the school newspapers, and social media.

After several months of waiting for answers, several missed classes, several trips to Columbus, several court date changes, and two court appearances, our attorneys finally got the charges dropped because the court had not given us a timely trial. Yet as we know, the Internet lasts forever. There's no way to hide what happened or put this past me. Any third party background

check will show that I was charged with a crime. Am I proud for standing up against an anti-Semite? Yes. Do I want to have this conversation anytime I go in for an interview? No.

Four years later here I am today. Missing work and my responsibilities to still deal with this situation by coming here to testify so you will understand the face of anti-Semitism at the grassroots level at a university in Ohio. Yet this time it was my choice. One of the most beautiful things about Israel, is that it's a place of democracy and free speech, surrounded by countries that hinder that liberty. Yet the people who tried to silence us, and ultimately got us arrested, act against that freedom in America. They claim to be fighting for civil liberties and human rights, yet they silenced us.

Our enemies have tried to wipe Israel and the Jewish people off this earth since the beginning of time. First it was wars, then it was the Holocaust, then suicide bombs and terrorism, and now slander and demonization. It's all about the destruction of Israel and the killing of Jews. It's not about human rights or social action, it's all about anti-Semitism. The BDS movement has one goal, and it's not for a two state solution or peace in the Middle East; it's for the destruction of Israel. It's anti-Semitic, and it is anti-American. It goes against American values of freedom and democracy, values we share with Israel.

I believe that the enactment of HCR 10 will start us on the right path to begin to eliminate anti-Semitism and violation of our freedom of speech rights on Ohio campuses, and I urge the honorable members of this Committee to approve it unanimously for passage to the Ohio House floor.

I respectfully thank you for your time and attention, and I will answer any of your questions.

Gabriel Sirkin
gabe.sirkin1@gmail.com