

Honorable Chairs and members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of those opposing the HCR10 bill. My name is Claire Kotarski, and I am a senior Religion major at Oberlin College outside of Cleveland. I am the co-chair of the Oberlin Jewish Voice for Peace chapter, which formed as a response to false charges of anti-Semitism on our campus that equated unequivocal support of Israel with Jewish identity and critique of the Israeli state with anti-Semitism.

I can firmly say, as a proud Jew, that the BDS movement is not a form of anti-Semitism. This bill, if passed, serves to infringe on our rights of free speech, and actually silences Jewish supporters of the boycott that the bill aims to protect. Placing economic pressure on a state involved in human rights violations is not anti-Semitism, but it is one expression of exercising a pursuit of justice that was so heavily enforced in the Jewish communities I took part in growing up. Boycott is a nonviolent expression of dissent, and we have already seen its effectiveness in dismantling apartheid South Africa.

As a student organizer, I have experienced first hand the overwhelming propaganda that seeks to undermine student efforts to educate people about the situation in Israel-Palestine. Several of my friends are blacklisted on websites such as Canary Mission, which seeks to make it difficult for students involved in Palestinian solidarity work to be employed after college due to branding them as anti-Semites. Several of my friends on these blacklisting websites are Jews, and the majority of people I know supporting BDS on my campus are Jewish.

These bills are the result of a campaign to suppress Palestine human rights activism in the U.S. Israel's interest in restricting this activism should not override our right to advocate for change. Our right to engage in boycotts related to Israeli human rights abuses is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Whatever your views on Israel and Palestine, these bills should be of concern because they threaten the rights of everyone in the U.S. to take collective action to address injustice. Moreover, we should all be alarmed that a foreign government, Israel, is lobbying U.S. politicians to restrict our rights.

Sincerely,
Claire Kotarski