

Testimony in Opposition to HCR 10
Ohio General Assembly | House of Representatives
House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee
October 30, 2017 | Columbus, OH
Testimony of Farah Chohan

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, Members of this honorable Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen, My name is Farah Chohan and I am here to ask you to vote against HCR 10.

I am a student at Cleveland State University and from Columbus. I was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio and have had the privilege to study abroad in Europe and the Middle East for close to four years. As an American, and a resident of Ohio, I enjoy the freedom to take positions and stances for and against various issues. I sometimes take positions contradictory to those of lawmakers, mayors, or even presidents. I am able to do that because the US Constitution allows me to.

Our US Supreme Court has recognized that boycotts “to bring about political, social and economic change,” like human rights boycotts of Israel, are unquestionably protected under the First Amendment. *NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware Co.*, 458 U.S. 886, 911 (1982) (citing *Carey v. Brown*, 447 U. S. 455).

HCR 10 wrongfully places The General Assembly in condemnation of my right to boycott in Ohio. It also accuses those who engage in boycotts of being anti-Semitic. Anti-Semitism is defined as hostility to or discrimination against Jews. Israel is a state, not a people. Critique and boycott of a state is not indicative of prejudice against its people.

As a young girl, I strongly supported the boycott of the South African Apartheid. By supporting the boycott of the South African Apartheid, that did not make me anti-white. Just like my supporting the boycott of the Israeli Apartheid, does not make me Anti-Jewish.

I went to a private all girl school in Bexley Ohio for 12 years where I had many Jewish classmates and my best friend since childhood is Jewish. It is offensive to call me anti-Semitic for supporting International Human Rights. Illegal Occupation and oppression have nothing to do with Judaism and to criticize these things is not anti-Semitic. Judaism is a beautiful faith and stands against oppression.

I do not believe that any person is superior to another person based on their race, religion, or wealth. I believe we are all equal in the eyes of God. As a person of faith, I feel it is my moral obligation to selectively decide where I spend my money. I also feel it is my moral duty to educate others about any injustices or human right violations and how they can peacefully take a stance against the Illegal Occupation of Israel. The BDS movement gives voice to just that.

This resolution, HCR 10, on its face is about a kind of thought control with a campus focus, but the dimensions of it are as much about political influence over college students. Boycotts, Divestments, Sanctions is a movement for freedom, justice and equality. BDS upholds the simple principle that Palestinians are entitled to the same rights as all human beings.

Israel is occupying and colonizing Palestinian land, discriminating against Palestinian citizens of Israel and denying Palestinians the right to return to their homes. I lived for 3 and ½ years as an American student studying abroad in Jordan and have heard the stories first hand from Palestinian refugees and have seen the scars of physical abuse by the Israeli Military against Palestinians. BDS was inspired by the South African Anti-Apartheid movement. The BDS call urges action to pressure Israel to comply with international law.

HCR 10 concludes the activities of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaigns in Ohio are harmful and have a deleterious impact on the educational environment. This directly contradicts Supreme Court rulings. The Supreme Court has explicitly held, in rulings spanning decades that speech cannot be restricted simply because it offends some listeners. Justice Douglas famously wrote, "[F]ree speech . . . may indeed best serve its high purpose when it induces a condition of unrest . . . or even stirs people to anger. Speech is often provocative and challenging. It may strike at prejudices and preconceptions and have profound unsettling effects as it presses for acceptance of an idea." *Terminiello v. Chicago*, 337 U.S. 1, 4 (1949).

Please, stand up for the First Amendment and with those who want peace and justice for all people of Israel/Palestine, and oppose this legislation.

Thank you for your attention. I urge you to vote no on HCR 10 and to protect free speech in Ohio.