

**Howie Beigelman | Proponent Testimony: HB 606
Finance Committee | Ohio House of Representatives
Columbus, OH | June 18, 2024**

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the Finance Committee:

Introduction and Statement of Interest

As you know, Ohio Jewish Communities is the statewide, bipartisan government advocacy, public affairs, and community outreach voice of Ohio's eight Jewish federations and their 150 nonprofit human services agencies providing cultural, religious, health and mental health, workforce development and crisis related services to thousands of Ohioans of every faith, and of none, each day. As always, we speak on their behalf. Today, we especially speak on behalf of our college campus communities including the Chabads, Hillels, and Greek Life organizations across Ohio's public and private universities. We also speak up today for the thousands of individual students, staff, and faculty on our college campuses.

Imagine for a moment that there is a crisis on our college campuses. Imagine that there are students being intimidated, harassed, and physically, violently attacked simply because of who they are. Imagine they reach out to the university administration, but the universities are unsure of their legal – and constitutional – obligations and they are unsure of how to act. Imagine that these students file formal complaints, but never hear back. Imagine the student organizations or fraternities they turned to as a safe space became targets too. Imagine individual professors and university staff, even at their most well intentioned, didn't respond. Imagine that the only recourse for some was a federal civil rights investigation, or a private lawsuit.

I know what you're all thinking. There's no reason for us to imagine any of this. Because it happened, across Ohio, and throughout the United States this past year.

Here in Ohio:

1. Students received death threats;
2. Students were physically assaulted to the point that Governor DeWine had to deploy the State Patrol off campus;
3. Students had their homes broken into and vandalized;
4. Students were followed and had glass bottles thrown at them;
5. Students had people attempting to break in to their fraternity house;
6. Students were spit upon; and,
7. Students were forced to decide if they could wear religious clothing or jewelry.

Throughout the year, as incidents like these – and others multiplied – our universities struggled to respond. Because of that, two public universities here in Ohio are currently being investigated for Title VI federal civil rights violations, and one university is the subject of a civil lawsuit.

The bill before you today provides that response. It also provides an effective answer to federal investigators. We are here today, in full support of HB 606 to ask that you take swift action to ensure that by the next

semester, our colleges and universities are better prepared to handle any crisis. We, like you, hope that none of our universities need to be investigated for civil rights violations.

What this Legislation Will Do

This legislation has been written to provide the guidelines and guardrails so that any student on any campus in Ohio not only has the same rights and expectations, but similar protocols and procedures.

You know why we, as Ohio Jewish Communities, are here. But this bill will help every student on all our campuses. Whether students, faculty, and staff are targeted – as they were this year, simply for being Jews – or whether it is students on one side or another of any current event: the Sudanese Civil War, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, or the 2024 presidential election this legislation stands for the premise that no matter who a student is, they have the right to both be free and feel safe on campus.

This legislation requires universities to, either on their own, or through the Chancellor of Higher Education, to:

1. Ensure procedures and protocols are in place for students to file complaints, along with a timeline of when students should expect to hear back on the investigation, and, what potential penalties they face.
2. Report to the Chancellor and the Ohio Attorney General, as well as Ohio's US Attorneys, on how many complaints they receive each year and how those complaints are handled;
3. Train faculty and staff on how to appropriately respond when a student says something hateful to another student;
4. Examine ways the university can work with law enforcement and with targeted communities on partnerships that increase student safety;
5. Work to better understand hate, including Jew-hatred, and ways to both define it and combat it;
6. Provide emergency one-time grant funds to certain student groups facing urgent security challenges;
7. Fund a Chancellor's grant program for campus security and safety that is able to quickly react to crises as they arise;
8. Fund programs that help create opportunities for intergroup, interfaith, and other cross-cultural experiences for students to help break down stereotypes and disinformation.

Who Supports Such Legislation

This bill was crafted as the result of listening to students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, administrators, and trustees for over 7 full months. This bill was initially drafted and redrafted with consistent, constant updates from those most directly impacted: our college students and the campus community professionals who work with them. We also worked with our state's university associations and with the Ohio Department of Higher Education from the very beginning.

This means the bill has strong support. With incredible joint sponsors in Rep. Pizzulli and Rep. Jarrells, it is also bipartisan, and, we at OJC are quick to note, it has the support of the House Jewish Caucus. So thank you especially to Rep. Brown-Piccolantonio for her support as well as to Reps. Isaacsohn and Weinstein.

The bill has the support of Ohio's Jewish communities, our campus Hillels and Chabads, and that of many state and national partners, including some who will give testimony. Others can be seen on this addendum to our testimony.

Next Steps – Urgency of Action

We know that this Committee especially and the General Assembly as a whole is incredibly busy right now. We are very appreciative that Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, and Ranking Member Sweeney have prioritized this bill now. While the bill has a companion in the Senate also assigned to their Finance Committee, we ask that you report this bill out as quickly as possible and pass it on the House floor as well.

There may be other opportunities for us to work together to combat hate. But this bill today, is a very good bill that will also do good immediately. We ask that you not wait, but that you act now.

Thank you for this opportunity, and for listening.

I'm available for any questions. We look forward to working with you.

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