

HADASSAH
The Women's
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hadassah.org

The Honorable Bob Peterson
Chairman
House Oversight Committee
Ohio Legislature

December 10, 2024

Re: HB 618 (Define Antisemitism for Specified Purposes)

Dear Chairman Peterson:

My name is Carol Ann Schwartz, and I am the National President of Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America. I also have deep roots in Ohio, as a long-time Cincinnati resident who raised a family here, an executive of a three-generation Cincinnati family business and graduate of the University of Cincinnati and Xavier University. I am joined in this testimony by my colleague Emily Hindin, President of Hadassah's Columbus, Ohio chapter, who married and raised her children in Ohio as well.

Hadassah was founded over 100 years ago to bring health care to pre-state Israel. We are now the largest Jewish women's organization in the United States with nearly 300,000 members and supporters nationally and over 4,300 passionate members in Ohio. Hadassah has a global presence in 18 countries and a major healthcare system in Israel with two world-class hospital campuses in Jerusalem and youth villages supporting at-risk children. In the US, we advocate to heal the world through fighting antisemitism, advancing the US-Israel relationship and championing women's and public health.

As a Cincinnati resident and a Jewish woman, leader and mother I urge you to support H.B. 618. If enacted, this legislation would help ensure that Ohio's laws against discrimination, which include protection against discrimination on the basis of religion or shared ancestry, utilize the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism including its contemporary examples. Importantly, the legislation would require that the IHRA definition of antisemitism be used as an educational tool in state anti-discrimination and bias training and that state agencies consider the IHRA definition when determining whether an alleged act is motivated by discriminatory antisemitic intent.

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Hatred towards the Jewish people dates back to ancient times. Yet today, antisemitism is approaching critical levels. In 2023, reports of antisemitic incidents increased 140%. The rise in antisemitism is beyond more alarming in Ohio, with a nearly 300% increase in reported incidents across the state from 2022. We cannot let this become the norm.

However, we cannot fight back against antisemitism without first defining what it is. We must be able to easily identify antisemitic acts. That is why adopting the IHRA definition of antisemitism, with all 11 contemporary examples, is so important. The IHRA working definition of antisemitism is rooted in consensus. It is widely recognized as an essential tool in naming and fighting Jew hatred and has been adopted by more than 1,000 global entities including 43 countries and more than 35 US states.

Antisemitism manifests in many forms, from physical acts of violence against Jews, to attacks on Jewish places of worship, to inflammatory anti-Zionist rhetoric which denies the Jewish people's right to self-determination. Adopting an agreed-upon definition of antisemitism will allow us to effectively respond to rampant antisemitism in our communities and on college campuses.

This spring we saw an uproar of antisemitism and anti-Zionism on college campuses across the United States, including Ohio State University, Case Western Reserve University, and my alma-mater Xavier University. These acts of antisemitism deeply affect people's lives – students, faculty, staff and community members.

According to the FBI, Jews are less than 3% of the population, but 68% of all religiously motivated hate crimes in the US are against Jews. These acts of antisemitism deeply affect people's lives, especially women, who are afraid for their children and their communities. Many are afraid to speak out in the face of such hatred. We can and need to do better to stem the tide of rising antisemitism.

The IHRA definition has not limited free speech in the over 35 US states where it has been adopted, and as noted in the bill text, it will not infringe upon First Amendment rights. Instead, it will protect Jewish institutions. It will safeguard Jewish students in college. It will create safer and more peaceful communities across Ohio.

The state legislature must do everything in its power to protect Ohio residents from hate, bias and bigotry. I urge you to vote yes on House Bill 618 and stand up to hate.

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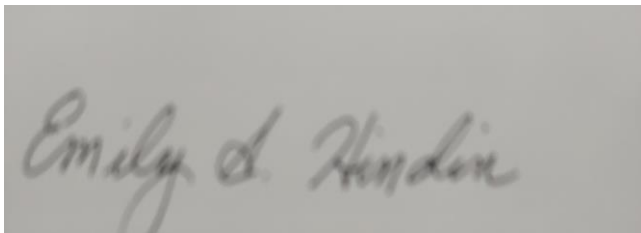
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Thank you for your time today.

Sincerely,



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