

**Dr. Terry Johnson**

State Senator  
14<sup>th</sup> District



Sponsor Testimony  
Senate Bill 297  
Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee  
November 20, 2024

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 297.

Last year, following the October 7<sup>th</sup> attack on Israel, we witnessed a concerning wave of extremist demonstrations across several college campuses. Antisemitism is seemingly on the rise in these institutions of higher education, exacerbating tensions against Jewish students. These students have increasingly found themselves facing discrimination, harassment, and even violence.

Such experiences not only create a hostile environment for Jewish students, but also undermine the principles of diversity and inclusion that universities claim to uphold. It is essential for campuses, especially our state universities, to actively investigate and address antisemitism and other forms of ethnic intimidation.

The demonstrations related to pro-Gaza protests on college campuses have been marked by disturbing displays of aggression and intolerance. Many of these protests have crossed the line into antisemitism by targeting Jewish students and expressing hateful rhetoric. Even more recently, just last weekend a Neo-Nazi demonstration occurred right here in Columbus, marching down High Street.

Ethnic intimidation is already against the law here in Ohio and can be added as an additional charge for violations such as aggravated menacing, menacing, criminal damaging or endangering, and criminal mischief. This

legislation would expand that charge to also include aggravated rioting and rioting committed by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin of another person or group.

Additionally, this legislation seeks to define antisemitism as, “*a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred... rhetorical and physical manifestations directed towards Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, Jewish community institutions, and religious facilities.*” This definition comes from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, the purpose of which will be used towards the investigations and proceedings by state agencies.

Finally, this legislation shall not be construed to diminish or infringe on any right protected by the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution or Ohio Constitution. The freedom of speech and public demonstrations are ingrained in our American way of life. It is crucial for such protests to adhere to the principles of respect, empathy, and constructive dialogue between all perspectives.

Thank you again for your time and attention. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.