

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson...

My name is Ethan Dobres. I'm a student at Ohio State and a lifelong Ohioan. 75 years ago this week, my grandfather immigrated to Ohio after spending his childhood hiding from the Nazis. I'm sure when he arrived here, he would have difficulty imagining a state government could be as supportive to the Jewish community as this one has. From the CAMPUS Act to the Nonprofit Security Grant Program to investments in Israel Bonds, Ohio's government has been a huge ally to the state's Jewish community. However, I'm also sure that my grandpa, one of thousands of Holocaust survivors who began a new life here in Ohio, could not have imagined that in 2024, our state would continue to be plagued by neo-nazi marches, antisemitic threats, and vandalism of Jewish institutions and homes.

While we know hatred and bigotry can not be eliminated by legislation, this bill, SB 297, is a step in the right direction as we continue our fight against antisemitism. I've spent the last year in meeting after meeting with policymakers and university administrators, who have all been very supportive, yet often unclear on what exactly constitutes antisemitism. Having a clear and state-mandated definition of antisemitism would be extremely helpful as we work together to make our college campuses - and our state as a whole - a safer and more welcoming place for Jewish students and families. I am also confident that this is the right definition of antisemitism. The International Holocaust Remembrance Association working definition has been embraced by the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations, as well as by leaders across the political spectrum all over the nation and world. Bills to include this definition into state law have been signed by Republican governors, like in Florida and Arizona, as well as by Democratic governors, like in Kentucky and North Carolina. It's clear to me that adopting this legislation will give a clear signal that Ohio is a state where antisemitism is not welcome.

In addition to wanting to live in a state that opposes antisemitism, I want to live in a state that supports the right to free speech. I want to attend a college campus where I hear opinions that I might not always agree with. I would not be testifying here today in support if I believed that this bill threatened the freedom of expression. The bill's language makes it explicitly clear that it is well-aligned with the first amendment, as it continues a long pattern of anti-discrimination laws that support both free speech and the right to live without facing incessant hatred. And while I think this bill is a necessary step in the fight against antisemitism, there is even more the state government can do to strengthen hate crime laws and make Ohio a safer and more tolerant place for all marginalized groups.

As I think back to what my grandfather was doing 75 years ago right now, I also think about the next 75 years, and what I want this state to look like as I continue to grow up here. I really believe that passing SB 297 will help make Ohio a better, safer, and more welcoming place to live.