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Subject: Writtent Testimony for Ohio SB 297/IHRA definition

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice-Chair, and esteemed members of the Ohio State Legislature. My name is Amanda Berman, and I am here on behalf of the Zioness Movement, a multiracial coalition of Jewish activists and allies who are unabashedly progressive and unapologetically Zionist. Our grassroots organization includes more than 30 chapters across the country that fight for the advancement of social, racial, economic, and gender equality in America, and for the inclusion of Zionists in social justice spaces. I am testifying in support of Senator Terry Johnson's bill, SB 297, codifying the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism into law.

As the Founder and CEO of Zioness, I represent a progressive organization that champions the intersection of progressive activism and Jewish identity. For those of us on the left, supporting IHRA is essential to ensuring that the fight against antisemitism is an integrated part of broader struggles for equity and liberation. I emphasize the importance of using IHRA as the standardized definition to combat antisemitism because it effectively aligns with broader progressive values of letting the oppressed define the terms of their own oppression, and enables clear distinctions between legitimate criticisms of Israeli policy and harmful antisemitic rhetoric.

Antisemitism remains one of the most persistent and evolving forms of hatred in the world. Despite its ancient roots, it adapts to modern contexts, manifesting in ways that endanger Jewish lives and undermine our collective social fabric. In the wake of the barbaric assault on the people of Israel on October 7, and Israel's defensive response, antisemitism couched in the language of "anti-Zionism" has exploded—ranging from assaults on visibly Jewish individuals to the normalization of anti-Jewish rhetoric in mainstream and political discourse.

It is clear that we are at a critical juncture. Antisemitism, unchecked, is a malignant and metastatic force that destroys everything it touches, from social movements to entire societies and even continents. The State of Ohio has the opportunity now to take a critical step in addressing this flourishing and dangerous form of hate within its borders. The IHRA definition simply provides a comprehensive, actionable framework for identifying antisemitism in its many forms, including its most frequent contemporary manifestation: masquerading as criticism of Israel or Zionism.

IHRA is itself crystal clear: legitimate critiques of Israeli policies are not antisemitic, and reference to the definition is legally non-binding—making fears of prosecution or other penalties resulting from IHRA clearly unfounded. But when such critiques of Israel or Zionism deny the Jewish people their right to self-determination, use antisemitic tropes, or hold Jews collectively responsible for the actions of a state, they cross the line into antisemitism—and should be labeled as such. Labeling something antisemitic does not mean it should be punished—and often, in the case of protected speech, including hate speech, it cannot be punished. That doesn't mean it should not be identified as antisemitism. This distinction, vital for protecting free speech while opposing hate, lies at the heart of the IHRA definition. No one wants to curb free speech, even when it veers into hate speech.

Anti-Jewish bigotry is not abstract, theoretical, or academic; it is tangible, visceral, and dangerous, and it appears at times and in spaces where the Jews experiencing it do not have the luxury of a philosophical debate. Codifying the IHRA definition empowers lawmakers, educators, and institutions to recognize antisemitism and respond effectively in support of the Jewish community and our whole democracy. IHRA ensures consistency and clarity, removing the ambiguity that bad actors exploit to perpetuate anti-Jewish hate. When one minority group's safety is at risk, all minority groups' safety is at risk.