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The Honorable Nathan H. Manning, Chairman  
Senate Judiciary Committee Ohio Senate  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

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Chairman, Board of Directors

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Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson  
and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony on Senate Bill 297. I write on behalf of the Union of Orthodox Congregations of America (“Orthodox Union”), the nation’s largest Orthodox Jewish umbrella organization, representing hundreds of synagogues and Jewish schools, including many across the State of Ohio. The Orthodox Union strongly supports Senate Bill 297. Combatting antisemitism in all its forms is especially critical right now.

**I. The Bill Seeks to Address Antisemitism Amid Skyrocketing Reports of Hate**

In 2023 the ADL tracked 8,873 antisemitic incidents nationwide. This represented an increase of 140% from the prior year and is the highest single year number since the ADL began tracking incidents in 2023. 5,024 of these incidents came in the wake of the October 7<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks on Israel. In light of these stunning statistics, it is more critical than ever that Ohio take action to combat rising antisemitism and this critical legislation is a first step to ensuring this problem is taken seriously.

**II. Codifying a Legal Definition of Antisemitism will Help Fight Antisemitism**

Jewish communities in Ohio, and across the United States, are under attack by antisemites and these haters often hide behind claims of “free speech” and/or anti-Israel rhetoric. SB 297’s guidance will ensure that Ohio can hold antisemites accountable for discrimination across political and ideological lines.

Antisemitism can be as clear as it was when Neo-Nazi’s marched through Columbus on November 19<sup>th</sup> or it can hide behind innuendo and implication. Both must be fought and having a

solid legal definition will provide clear guidance to state institutions on what language and rhetoric is unacceptable and harmful.

**III.** Ensuring that antisemitic discrimination is taken seriously will protect Jewish students on campuses where they feel historically unsafe

In November of 2023, just three months into the 2023-2024 school year, a survey by ADL, Hillel International and College Pulse found that 73% of Jewish students had experienced or witnessed some form of antisemitism since the beginning of the school year. Between October 7<sup>th</sup> and the end of November, more than 25% of Jewish students changed their views of if they felt comfortable with others knowing that they are Jewish.

Nationwide, we have seen a failure by campus administrators to address rising antisemitism. This bill will allow Ohio to become a leader in holding such administrators accountable for the discrimination which happens under their supervision.

**IV.** SB 297 Does Not Threaten Free Speech

Critics of the IHRA definition have asserted that the working definition of antisemitism will hinder free speech around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To claim that a definition which includes the specific statement that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic,” is one that seeks to limit free speech is simply not credible.

The IHRA definition specifically goes out of its way to leave open the opportunity to criticize Israeli governmental actions and policies without crossing into historic antisemitic tropes. Those fighting so strenuously against it are simply revealing that their arguments rest on the bad faith of simply ignoring parts of the definition which inconvenience their views.

**Conclusion**

At this moment, American Jews are looking to elected leaders to take a clear stand against the antisemitism that has swept this land of liberty. Our communities in Ohio are looking to you to stand with us and against hate and pass Senate Bill 297.

Thank you,

**Nathan Diament**  
Executive Director