

Proponent Testimony for Ohio Senate Bill 297: Adoption of the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 297, which proposes the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.

My name is “Neal” Othniel Dearyan, and I am a pastor who has had the privilege of co-hosting numerous trips to Israel, leading groups to witness firsthand the profound significance of the Jewish people and their ancient homeland. These experiences have deepened my understanding and commitment to supporting the Jewish community, both here in Ohio and globally.

It has also been my privilege to stand side by side with Jewish people on American streets as they endured loud verbal threats, hatred, and lies. Despite the intensity of these challenges, I have watched them respond with incredible respect and dignity—never retaliating in kind, but instead holding fast to their faith and commitment to peace. Their strength in the face of such adversity has only deepened my respect for them and their right to live free from fear and discrimination.

The IHRA definition of antisemitism provides a clear, comprehensive framework for identifying and addressing hate and discrimination against Jews. It offers a balanced approach that acknowledges the importance of free speech while safeguarding the Jewish community from the harmful effects of hate speech, discrimination, and prejudice.

The urgency of this issue is underscored by alarming statistics. According to the FBI’s 2022 Hate Crime Statistics Report, nearly 60% of all religiously motivated hate crimes in the U.S. were anti-Jewish, despite Jews comprising just over 2% of the U.S. population. This stark statistic highlights the persistent and growing threat of antisemitism, both in Ohio and across the nation. This has only gotten worse since the horrific events of October 7.

By adopting the IHRA definition, Ohio would be taking a vital step in combatting this troubling rise in antisemitic incidents. This measure ensures we have a unified standard to recognize when antisemitism masquerades as political speech, protecting the Jewish community from harmful acts of hatred and violence.

As a pastor who believes in the value of community and respect for all people, I wholeheartedly support this bill. I urge this committee to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism as part of Ohio's commitment to justice, equality, and the protection of all our citizens from hate.

Thank you.

Pastor Neal Dearyan

Crossroads Baptist Church