

Good morning,

Today, I ask the Senate Judiciary Committee to reject encoding the IHRA definition of antisemitism into law. This definition of antisemitism assumes that all Jews share the same opinions and support for Israel, and therefore that criticizing Israel is prejudiced against Jews. Not only are these assumptions inaccurate, they also lean into antisemitic tropes of “dual loyalty”. As a Jew who was born in Jerusalem and was raised as a visibly religious Jew, I’m very familiar with Israel, Zionism, and antisemitism. I’ve educated myself on Israel from a variety of sources, most of them Jewish and Israeli organizations, such as The Center for Jewish Nonviolence, B’tselem, Breaking The Silence, Culture of Solidarity, Mesarvot, Shores, Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow, and many others.

All of these Jewish/Israeli organizations have criticized the State of Israel before. These organizations are certainly not antisemitic.

Studies have shown that Jews have many different opinions on Israel. Jews, like any large group of people, are not a monolith, despite what the IHRA definition of antisemitism assumes.

If the IHRA definition of antisemitism is encoded into law, I, a Jew well-educated on the subject of Israel, can be expelled from an Ohio University or lose my job over calling out the State of Israel, who Amnesty International has found to be committing genocide in the Gaza Strip. I can be disciplined just for my testimony to you including that last sentence. As Ohio state representatives, you all have responsibilities to protect the right to free speech of your constituents. Criticizing any government or country is not hate speech or prejudice, and the right to do so must be protected.

While the recent rise of antisemitic attacks is concerning, in almost every instance, the attacker was a far-right conspiracy theorist, not an anti-Zionist protestor. This bill would not protect Jews. What it would do is censure Palestinians, Jews, or anyone who calls out the Israeli government for their war crimes, and further conflate antizionism and antisemitism, which likely further fuels far-right conspiracy theories, thereby harming Jews in the long run.

Thank you for your time,

Moshe Koval