

## Letter Concerning SB 297

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a resident of Ohio, a journalist, and a practicing Jew. I work at Case Western Reserve University, where I am the Shirley Wormser Professor of Journalism and Media Writing.

My Jewish ancestors fled pogroms in Europe in the 1920s and many of my relatives who remained were killed in the Holocaust. I lived for a decade in Germany and learned much about the legacy of the Holocaust, and about Germany's own failures to reckon with its history while preserving basic constitutional rights of free expression and assembly. The United States, where free speech protections are stronger than anywhere in the world, should be careful not to follow Germany's example.

I am also an Emmy and Peabody award-winning foreign journalist, writing for The New York Times, the New Yorker, and other publications, often reporting on minority rights in China, Syria, Iraq, and other countries with poor records of human rights or civil liberties. I have more than 15 years' experience with issues of self-determination across Asia and the Middle East, including the Israel/Palestine conflict.

I am opposed to SB297's use of the IHRA. The working definition is a flawed text, opposed by more than 100 organizations including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. This definition is dangerous, and the act ties this flawed definition to increasingly harsh punishments for the crime of ethnic intimidation. The IHRA's own authors make clear the definition was not intended to be codified into law, yet it is being manipulated to suppress critique, target individuals, and stifle free speech. The IHRA definition has become a tool used by foreign lobbyists to suppress legitimate criticism of Israel. Antisemitism and anti-Zionism are different and equating or using them interchangeably distracts from the actual work of dismantling antisemitism.

In the United States, if our rights are to have any meaning, we must remain free to criticize the actions of any government. The IHRA expands the accepted understanding of antisemitism as hatred of the Jewish people to include criticism of Israel, creating a false and dangerous conflation between antisemitism and criticism of Israel. It does not make Jews safer. As a Jew, and as a person who has worked his entire life for tolerance and human rights, I am strongly opposed to its use in SB297. An appropriate alternative, the Jerusalem Definition, is supported by a wide range of Jews and human rights experts. SB297 should use this definition instead.

Best regards,



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