

Hello, my name is Jerah Pettibone and I'm here to speak in fierce opposition to SB 297.

So, my mom used to say a lot that "if you have 10 Jews in a room you have 11 opinions" Jewish culture is full of opinions. It's full of creative thinking. It's full of sincere and constructive debate. It's been that way since the creation of the Palestinian Talmud in the 4th century. An entire book of scholarly debate, still a pillar of the Jewish faith today.

The right to disagree, to come to one's own opinion, and to debate, are treasured and celebrated Jewish values, and are not the property of any government.

My own Jewish opinion has been carefully formed. I grew up at the intersection of Judaism and Evangelical Christianity, got a degree in cultural philosophy and Arabic, and spent time living and working in the Middle East. My grandfather was an airman in WWII and I continue to engage extensively with people and current events in the region.

The fact is that MANY Jews, like myself, don't agree with the actions of the state of Israel. Some don't even agree theologically that Israel should exist. Does that make us anti-semitic? Do we hate ourselves? This accusation is absurd, when Judaism and Jewish debate have existed for 2400 years longer than the state of Israel itself. Israel is a blip on the map of Judaism. A radical smear of blood on our religious history.

Hundreds of thousands of people from diverse Jewish communities all over the US and the world have spoken out against the actions of the Israeli state. And although that is our responsibility both as Jews and American citizens, hundreds have already been arrested, injured, detained, prosecuted, lost jobs, got kicked out of school - harmed.

Which brings me to the very first example of anti-semitism provided in this bill, Its says antisemitism is:

"Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.

HB 297 is a bill that robs Jewish people of the ability to express ourselves freely within our own communities, causes us harm, and therefore commits anti-semitism just by its existence. It endangers Jewish people and everyone else who exercises their constitutional rights of free speech and freedom of religion.

It fuels the fire of real anti-semitism, and the smoke from that fire clouds our ability to see true anti-semitism where it lies. According to this bill, every single person in this room is anti-semitic including all government officials, and the majority of American voters - regardless of party affiliation - who support a ceasefire in Palestine.

This bill will inhibit my ability to practice Judaism by inflicting cruel penalties just for supporting people in my community and for speaking up for our collective civil rights. To practice doykait - the diasporic concept of 'hereness' first coined in Lithuania in 1897, before the creation of Israel, whereby we strengthen Jewish Communities through solidarity with the community in which we live.

As a Jew, an educator, a farmer, a public servant, a member of the queer community, a person born and raised in Ohio, I urge you to oppose this bill. Existing laws already adequately address acts of anti-semitism. The broadness and ambiguity of this bill will gut one of America's most time-honored forms of self expression and mechanisms of social progress - protest - to which we owe almost every single civil right we boast here in this great nation.

On Friday, our Senator Joyce Beatty, former Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, has organized an event honoring Rosa Parks - one of America's most beloved protestors - on which she urges us to "reflect on Rosa Parks' impact on our Freedoms as Americans" Will you pass BH 297, and call Rosa Parks a rioter instead?