

12/9/24

To the Members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee:

SB297's expanded definition of ethnic intimidation is deeply concerning and would serve to stifle public expression of dissent. Especially concerning is the bill's definition of a riot and the clause "With purpose to intimidate a public official or employee into taking or refraining from official action, or with purpose to hinder, impede, or obstruct a function of government." Pressuring public officials into taking or refraining from official action is a key component of democracy. Our elected officials have a responsibility to their office and to their constituents to represent our voices, and in turn, Ohioans have a responsibility to hold their elected leaders accountable. The expression of this relationship as a potential felony is dangerous and cowardly.

Additionally, as a proud Jew who has experienced anti-semitism, I am horrified by the IHRA Definition of Anti-Semitism. Though I have been an engaged, observant Jew my whole life, teaching religious school, leading High Holy Day services, and providing lay pastoral care to Jewish seniors, according to this definition, I would be considered anti-semitic because I criticize the State of Israel. I love my people, and I am bound to them. I want what is best for us. I do not believe that this fear-based and shortsighted reactionary bill will keep us safe. The only thing this bill will do is make it easier to use Judaism as a bludgeon for disingenuous political agendas. Judaism is a religion that values argument and disagreement. Each side of religious arguments, including the losing, are included in our Talmud. It is an insult to Judaism to use it to silence dissent. I urge you to reject SB297 in solidarity with the Jewish principle of makhloket l'shem shamayim, disagreement for the sake of heaven.

Thank you,

Moshe Seid  
Shema Cincinnati