

## Testimony in Opposition to Ohio SB 297

TO: Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

My name is Patricia Marida and I live in Columbus, Ohio.

I have been an active volunteer working for peace and social justice since 1981. I am a firm believer in the power of nonviolence and nonviolent civil disobedience. No social movement has ever been successful without civil disobedience. Women's suffrage, civil rights, unions.

This bill attempts to conflate criticism of the State of Israel with criticism of the Jewish people and the Jewish religion. Since the US first amendment provides for the separation of church and state, I can criticize the actions of my country without being accused of being hateful of some particular group. So first, I'd like to point out the importance of that separation.

What exactly might I be fined or jailed for saying or doing under HB 297? Who will interpret my words? How far can I go in criticizing the state of Israel? How might I be pointed out, sanctioned or even targeted by those who disagree with me? Could I be sanctioned for quoting the United Nations? Here are some headlines:

- 1) *11-14-24: [UN Special Committee finds Israel's warfare methods in Gaza consistent with genocide, including use of starvation as weapon of war.](#)*
- 2) *7-30-24: [Experts hail International Court of Justice declaration on illegality of Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory as "historic" for Palestinians and international law.](#)*
- 3) *11-21-24: [International Criminal Court issues arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant.](#)*
- 4) *7-30-24: [Independent rights experts urge States to comply with ICJ ruling on Israel.](#)*

One of those states being urged to comply with the International Court of Justice ruling is the United States. Without the US political support, and its massive export of weapons and dollars to Israel, this protracted war on Gaza could have happened. I criticize the US here. So would saying this be a crime under HB 297?

Much of the US media acts like there is no problem or climate risk: first, with the manufacture of these horrific weapons; second with the massive decimation of land, agriculture, and infrastructure, and third, no monetary or climate cost to rebuild – if that were always going to be possible. Gaza has no army. As of December 2024, over 44,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's attack, with the death toll likely in the hundreds of thousands. But that is just a statistic. Hearing just one personal story of starvation and disease is gut-wrenching. Can I be in legal trouble for relating this?

I hear hate speech being directed at real people – minorities, religious groups including Muslims and Jews, people that defy gender designations, and above all the ugliness of racism. I hear it from politicians. I leave it to this body to understand how laws against that might, or should be, enforced.

There are two major student organizations speaking out against Israel's attack. The Students for Justice in Palestine, many of whom are Palestinian or Muslim, and Jewish Voice for Peace, a mostly Jewish group. There is great irony that the latter, along with many others in the Jewish community, are being attacked for being antisemitic. And could face difficulty under this law.

I am retired so I can't be fired from my job. I am not a student, so my education and career will not be jeopardized. However, I have a granddaughter in college and I want her rights to be protected.

Thank you.