

To whom it may concern:

As a citizen of the State of Ohio, I write today to state for the record that I wish for Jewish people to have access to safety and to live meaningful lives, and I strenuously object to the proposed Ohio S.B. 297.

While I object to S.B. 297 on a great number of points, I would like to focus your attention on these three:

1. **S.B. 297, if enacted, will explicitly infringe on my religious freedom.**

Religious freedom in the State of Ohio is enshrined through the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and section 7 of the Constitution of the State of Ohio. I am a follower of Jesus Christ and it is my right to practice speaking out according to the principles He taught, including on several occasions when He demonstrated His teachings by speaking against Jewish leadership who were prioritizing following religious laws over human suffering (as in Matthew 23:13). As a follower of Christ, I am called to have this same courage to speak against any who would ignore the anguish and distress of a human.

S.B. 297 is an over-reaching bill that will severely restrict my ability to speak fully and freely according to my religious beliefs and faith.

2. **S.B. 297, if enacted, will explicitly infringe on my freedom of speech.**

Freedom of speech in the State of Ohio is enshrined through the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and section 11 of the Constitution of Ohio. As an adult of good conscience, I frequently find it necessary to talk respectfully about difficult, challenging and/or uncomfortable topics with Ohio citizens who may not share my experience or viewpoints. From time to time these people are Jewish. I am able to express myself, even to Jewish people, because my fundamental right to do so is protected by law.

3. **The entire premise of S.B. 297 is based on the 2016 definition of antisemitism according to the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA), which is a vague and imprecise definition. If used in an Ohio law, this definition would create confusion for persons who can't possibly be expected to interpret it accurately.**

**Yet this ambiguous definition is referred to, but not written into, S.B. 297.**

Since the authors of S.B. 297 chose not to include the cited IHRA definition in the proposed legislation, I offer it here for reference:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or nonJewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

Per the IHRA itself, this definition is to be considered “non-legally binding.”

As can be assessed by any reader, this IHRA definition of antisemitism is a vague, broad, non-specific definition, which includes property, institutions and facilities; this definition creates a class of non-persons and appears to give these non-persons rights that take precedence over the freedom of speech of nonJewish persons. This definition also confusingly refers to a class of “nonJewish” persons who are also party to this law because they may in some mysterious, bewildering manner be harmed by unspecified acts of antisemitism.

I am hard-pressed to see how basing a law on the puzzling IHRA definition will lead to clarity about antisemitism for a regular person; nor will such a perplexing law lead to greater safety for Jewish persons. And I am greatly troubled by the implication that some sort of non-person entities will suddenly have unclear protections under the law, which may make it impossible for a citizen of Ohio to interpret.

I cannot see how voting S.B. 297 into law would result in increased safety for anyone, including Jewish people, especially when *committing acts of discrimination based on religion are already against the law in Ohio*.

S.B. 297 does not serve a useful purpose and will not serve the people of Ohio in a beneficial way.

Respectfully,

**Julia Kay Coughlin, lifelong citizen of the State of Ohio**

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