

To the honorable Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the community,

As a proud Jewish-Clevelander, I am happy to submit my testimony in regards to SB 297. My name is Lucie Shiffman and I was born and raised in the Cleveland Jewish community. For me, this meant, going to and graduating from a Jewish Day school (Joseph and Florence Mandel Jewish Day School, formerly Agnon), attending Beachwood High School, which at the time was 85% Jewish, and serving as President for the Ohio Northern Region BBYO, the largest Jewish Youth Movement, as well as President and Social Justice chair for my campus Hillel. It meant going to Israel 4 times, before the age of 22, one of which on a trip called March of the Living, where I spent a week in Poland walking the path with 200 holocaust survivors, and 10,000 Jews from Auschwitz to Birkenau, before heading to Jerusalem to dance in the streets. This trip solidified my desire for freedom, to never again see the pain and suffering that a Holocaust causes. Never again for me, and never again for anyone. It is because of my Jewish education and values, and the experiences of growing up in a strong Jewish community, that I write to you today opposing SB 297.

It is said that to be Jewish is to ask questions, to not stand idly by and take other people's teachings as your own learning, to think critically and develop your own understanding of the Torah, of the world. This bill threatens our right to free speech. 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. A democratic society, and a strong Jewish community both thrive in worlds where healthy and robust debates exist. Under SB297, these debates and discussions are cut off, and citizens are silenced. Under SB 297, I, a proud Jew who attends synagogue, donates Tzedakah (charity), and works to build a better world, would be considered anti-semitic because I believe no state is above questioning, especially when human rights organizations, like Amnesty International, are questioning their actions as well.

I appreciate the efforts my home state is making to support Jewish community, and to combat anti-semitism. However, conflating criticism of Israel to anti-semitism does nothing more than silence and criminalize community members who are standing up for their values, and speaking up for Palestinians right to live. There are other ways of supporting the Jewish community that don't strip your citizens of their right to free speech and protest. I implore you to reject the IHRA definition of antisemitism and instead adopt the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism which "provides clear guidance to identify and fight antisemitism while protecting free expression."

Please join me in opposing SB 297.

Thank you,
Lucie Shiffman
South Euclid, Ohio