

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 12/10/2024

Name: Robin Beth Schaer

Are you representing: Yourself Organization

Organization (If Applicable): _____

Position/Title: _____

Address: 3621 Tollard Road

City: Shaker Heights State: OH Zip: 44122

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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): SB 297

Specific Issue: Encoding of IHRA definition of antisemitism

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? Submitting written testimony only.

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

Letter attached.

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.

**Robin Beth Schaer
3621 Tolland Road
Shaker Heights, OH 44122**

December 10, 2024

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee of the Ohio Senate,

I am a resident of Shaker Heights, though today I am writing to you from Berlin in Germany where I am working on a book about antisemitism and cycles of atrocity. As a writer, I have studied antisemitism for decades, and as a Jew, I am intimately and acutely aware of the way it has shaped the trajectory of my family history and the lingering grief and fear we carry.

I am deeply concerned about the proposed legislation in Senate Bill 297 which adopts a dangerous definition of antisemitism and ties that definition to increasingly harsh punishments for the crime of ethnic intimidation. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism was not intended by its authors to be codified into law, yet it is being manipulated to suppress critique, target individuals, and stifle free speech.

I trust that others more expert in legal matters will relate more fully the threat to the first amendment which passing Senate Bill 297 would pose; and I am certain others will clarify the pernicious ways enshrining the IHRA definition legitimizes anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia. So I would like speak to you more personally about the terrible impact encoding the IHRA definition of antisemitism will have on the Jewish community and the larger communities in which we live.

Very simply, antisemitism is the hatred of Jews, not criticism of a political ideology or a government. Jews are an ancient people, Zionism is a 19th century political ideology, and the state of Israel was founded in 1948 – they are not one in the same. We must all be free to critique the policies and actions of any government, Israel included. The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism asserts: “the same norms of debate that apply to other states and to other conflicts over national self-determination apply in the case of Israel.” Antisemitism and anti-Zionism are different and equating or using them interchangeably distracts from the actual work of dismantling antisemitism.

As a child, my grandmother taught me “scratch a gentile, find an antisemite” which is a terrible burden of isolation and distrust to carry. It took me decades to unlearn that lesson and recognize the utter imprecision of believing all gentiles were antisemites. That constant fear is not the world I want my child to grow up in and not a sentiment that I am passing down to him. However, insisting that legitimate criticism of the Israeli government is antisemitism, as the IHRA's definition does, only muddles, confuses, and labels antisemitism where there is none.

The IHRA definition creates false and dangerous connotations between both Judaism and Israel, and between antisemitism and criticism of Israel. The true threat of antisemitism lies precisely in the implication that Jewish loyalty and safety belong elsewhere. It is a persistent dangerous stereotype that Jews are outsiders, with no allegiance to our home – a stereotype which led to millennia of massacres, pogroms, scapegoating, and expulsions. If we do not discern the difference between true hatred of a people and criticism of a government, then we create divisions and fear where there need

not be. This entanglement divides our communities. We need to work to untangle these identities and understandings – not codify them further.

It is simple: one can rightfully denounce Israel's devastation of Gaza and ongoing oppression of Palestinians – as numerous world leaders and human rights organizations have – and still not hate Jews. Surely, as a Jew, when I condemn Israel's government it does not make me an antisemite. Yet, if SB 297 were to become law, my own testimony here would be "antisemitic" under its definition. My scholarship, the canonical literature I teach my students, and even the prayers I make in my Jewish congregation would all be "antisemitic" under this law.

Please do not perpetuate false definitions of antisemitism by passing Senate Bill 297. The more that we can educate each other and untangle these false narratives, the more precise and productive our rhetoric will be, and the more chance we have of dismantling hatred and creating a truly just and loving society together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Beth Schaer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robin Beth Schaer