

My name is Alex Kempler and I am a PhD candidate at OSU and a Jewish woman. I am an active member of Jewish Voice for Peace and in leadership for the student club Jews for Justice in Palestine at Ohio State. I strongly oppose SB 297 and believe it is an attempt to weaponize my own people's trauma to repress dissent against the State of Israel. Throughout this year, I have worked with undergraduate students in my own courses and across campus, including Jewish students, Muslim students, Arab students, Palestinian students, and others who have been impacted by ongoing events in Israel/Palestine. These students express fear, frustration, anger, confusion. They want to talk about what's going on—they don't want to sweep it under the rug. This bill will do just that.

On April 25, 2024, I was arrested alongside my students in a peaceful protest demanding an end to the genocide in Gaza. While the university's president, Ted Carter, claims that these arrests were not about free speech, the university continues to enforce a double standard when it comes to Pro-Palestine protests. The university's space use policies were strategically amended just a week before the protests in response to anti-war demonstrations occurring on college campuses across the country. Under the guise of "space rules", the university aimed snipers at students and called in the State Troopers, the Campus Police, and CPD (yes, they were present, as they were the ones who did my intake in the student union). This was a level of repression that we have not seen on college campuses since Vietnam War protests and the tragic Kent State Massacre in 1970.

If this bill is to pass, I am deeply fearful that it will be used to justify continued repression and violence on college campuses--Ohio State being just one case in point. The night of my arrest, I looked around at these 18 to 22-year-olds faces and felt terror: how can one watch their students be brutalized by police on their own college campus? I am relieved that that night did not end with sustained injuries or death, but I do know that it is possible. This week, we received news that two individuals arrested on April 25 are suing Ted Carter and OSU police department detective Susan Liu, for the violation of their civil rights. Both are suing on four counts: false arrest, malicious prosecution, retaliatory arrest and prosecution, and First Amendment violations. One of these individuals was Dr. Sumaya Hamadmad, a Syrian immigrant who came to the United States to seek refuge 24 years ago. She was arrested on Ohio State's oval the morning before the protest, simply because she was sitting on the lawn, presumably wearing a head scarf. I beg you all to evaluate this: if it smells like fascism, and it looks like fascism, it is fascism. After all, if I, a Jewish woman who has had my Bat Mitzvah and visited Israel multiple times, cannot speak out against the war crimes of the Israeli government, who can?