

Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Dr. Sahar Abuimara, I am a Palestinian American from Ohio, I was born and raised in Gaz- Palestine to two Palestinian refugee children who survived the the Palestinian genocide and ethnic cleansing known as Nakba, inflicted on them by Israel in 1948. I am also the survivor of the military occupation and Apartheid imposed on Palestinians by Israel.

Growing up in Gaza under military occupation, freedom of speech and self expression was not an option, peaceful protest was a crime, embracing national identity and adopting national symbols was prohibited and punishable by military law. This has changed dramatically for me around twenty four years ago when I immigrated to USA, the first thing I cherished and treasured was my freedom of speech and expression that I would sadly be losing if SB297 passes.

I strongly oppose Senate Bill 297 (SB 297) as it threatens free speech, suppresses dissent, and sets a dangerous precedent by criminalizing legitimate political discourse. By adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, this bill conflates legitimate criticism of Israeli policies with hate speech, chilling activism, academic freedom, and peaceful protest. While combating antisemitism is essential, this broad definition risks silencing voices advocating for Palestinian rights and undermines First Amendment protections.

Under SB297 I will no longer be able to tell my personal and family story of ethnic cleansing, of living under Apartheid, I will no longer be able to tell the story of my family living under a televised genocide or advocate for their safety and their right to live in peace, I will no longer be able to publicly mourn my slain family who were mercilessly murdered while in their living room. I will be criminalized for advocating to end killing the and starving the children of Gaza.

The bill's expansion of "ethnic intimidation" to include riots and aggravated riots further criminalizes peaceful protest. Under vague definitions, protests involving five or more individuals could be mischaracterized as "riots," subjecting peaceful citizens to harsh penalties and increased surveillance. This selective enforcement disproportionately targets marginalized communities, including Muslims and Arabs, creating systemic barriers to advocacy and free expression. This would further marginalize these communities that are facing a tremendous rise of islamophobia, anti Palestinian and anti Arab hate leading to murders,, attempted murders and various hate crimes during the past fourteen months. (yet I have not seen any enough legislation to combat islamophobia, anti Palestinian or anti Arab hate) .

I unequivocally condemn antisemitism, but SB 297 is not the solution. I urge you to reject this bill, which stifles legitimate political discourse and undermines fundamental rights. Instead, lawmakers should adopt a precise definition of antisemitism that protects against hate without criminalizing free speech or advocacy for justice. The Jerusalem Declaration for example :

<https://jerusalemdeclaration.org>. Where there is a clear distinction between anti semitism and anti Zionism.

My freedom of speech as an American supercedes the interests of a foreign government that has been deemed plausibly committing genocide by the International Court of Justice, and has been found by Amnesty International to be committing Genocide in Gaza :

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/amnesty-international-concludes-israel-is-committing-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/>

Protecting free speech and upholding constitutional rights is critical to ensuring a democratic and just society, The state of Ohio and its legislators should distance itslef from supporting such an unconstitutional bill that undermines our first amendment right and supports questionable foreign interests.