

Dear Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

As a rabbi and a resident of Cleveland Heights, OH, I commend the Ohio Senate for taking a stand against anti-semitism. I was alarmed to see photos recently of neo-Nazis marching with swastikas in Columbus. Like so many Jews, my great-great grandparents fled anti-semitism in Eastern Europe to come to a country that would take anti-semitism more seriously.

However, I am writing to oppose SB 297.

Codifying the IHRA definition of anti-semitism into law would conflate harsh criticism of the State of Israel with antisemitism and heighten the risk of illiberal stifling of free speech. Under SB 297, and thus the IHRA definition, the political fight for a one state, multi-cultural democracy in Israel/Palestine where everyone has freedom and dignity would be considered anti-semitic.

The combination of large U.S. military aid to Israel and the anomalous nature of the ongoing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, make high profile actions protesting Israel (many of them by progressive Jews) explainable beyond the accusation of anti-semitism.

If you want to protect Jews from antisemitism, please adopt The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (<https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>), which provides “clear guidance to identify and fight antisemitism while protecting free expression.” It clearly outlines when criticism of Israel crosses the line into antisemitism and when it does not.

I urge you, do not stifle free speech in an attempt to protect Jews. A more robust, nuanced understanding of antisemitism is needed, such as the definition and guidelines offered by the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Rabbi Micah Shapiro
Cleveland Heights, OH