

## **Testimony Against Senate Bill 297**

*Presented by Dalal Shalash*

My name is Dalal Shalash. I recently graduated from OSU, where I have witnessed firsthand the consequences of suppressing dissent. In April, I was among the 45 students and community members arrested on my university's Oval during a peaceful protest. That experience deeply affirmed my belief in the necessity of protecting the right to speak freely, even when our words challenge power. This right, enshrined in the First Amendment, is at the core of my opposition to Senate Bill 297.

As I prepare for the LSAT, I've reflected on one of the first lessons anyone encounters before they even study the law, whilst they are merely thinking of studying the law: the concept of a logical fallacy. A logical fallacy is an argument that appears reasonable but crumbles under scrutiny because it is built on flawed logic. Senate Bill 297 rests on such a fallacy. It claims to combat antisemitism but, in reality, weaponizes its definition to silence dissent. By conflating legitimate, necessary criticism of state policies with hate speech, this bill undermines our constitutional commitment to free expression and the open exchange of ideas.

The bill proposes adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, which includes this controversial example: "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor."

But let me ask this committee: Does the First Amendment not protect the right to challenge state policies and practices? Would it not be unconstitutional to penalize speech that questions whether the actions of Israel—a state—can be characterized as a "racist endeavor"? For over 500 days, Israel has engaged in relentless violence—bombing homes, leveling neighborhoods, and killing families in their sleep. Policies of occupation, illegal settlements, and systemic discrimination against Palestinians are well-documented. Critiquing these actions is not hate speech; it is a call for justice and accountability.

When a state prioritizes one group's rights over another's, are we not obligated to critically examine and discuss these realities? Shielding such policies from scrutiny under the guise of fighting antisemitism is not only disingenuous but also an infringement on constitutionally protected speech.

Senate Bill 297 doesn't combat antisemitism—it stifles dissent. It doesn't protect Jewish communities from hate—it protects a political agenda, one that justifies the oppression of Palestinians while silencing anyone who dares to speak out. This bill sends a chilling message: that advocating for Palestinian human rights is unacceptable and that this legislature values some lives over others. It is a bill that condones the arrest, the degradation, and the humiliation of its

students whilst simultaneously ignoring the systematically unambiguous tyrannical rule of an ethno-state.

The First Amendment exists not to protect speech we agree with but to protect the speech we don't. If we allow Senate Bill 297 to pass, we set a dangerous precedent, opening the door for the suppression of dissent in other contexts. What does that say about our values as a nation?

My own experiences of sitting on a floor for 34 hours alongside my Jewish and Muslim comrades demonstrate that this bill does not seek to protect who it says it would. It seeks to protect the hands that wrote it. My arrest, alongside 44 others during a peaceful protest, demonstrated the lengths to which systems will go to suppress uncomfortable truths.

Reject Senate Bill 297. Let us combat antisemitism where it truly exists by not weaponizing it to suppress critical conversations about justice, oppression, and accountability. Protect the right to dissent, the cornerstone of our democracy, so no one else is forced to choose between speaking out and their freedom.

