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12/11/2024

The Honorable Nathan H. Manning
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

Subject: Opponent - Written Testimony on Senate Bill 297 -

Dear Chairperson Manning, Vice Chair, Senator Reynolds], Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Good morning, My name is Khalid Turaani, and I am the Executive Director of CAIR Ohio, Columbus | Cincinnati | Dayton. CAIR is the largest Muslim civil rights organization in America. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Senate Bill 297.

While we understand the intent of this bill to address hate speech and promote safety, I am here to voice our concerns. As written, Senate Bill 297 duplicates existing laws, infringes on First Amendment rights, and restricts our ability to critique foreign governments on matters like war crimes. I urge you to consider these issues carefully.

1. Redundancy of Senate Bill 297

This bill is unnecessary because existing state and federal laws already address hate speech, discrimination, and violence. Acts like assault, harassment, and incitement are illegal under current statutes. By duplicating these protections, the bill adds confusion to our legal system without offering additional safeguards. Instead of passing redundant legislation, I urge this committee to focus on enforcing existing laws more effectively.

2. Constitutional Concerns

Senate Bill 297 poses serious constitutional issues. The First Amendment protects free speech, including speech that is controversial or critical of foreign governments. This bill risks placing unconstitutional restrictions on speech that is essential to our democratic principles. Limiting our ability to speak out against foreign governments undermines the foundational freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. Such restrictions are neither necessary nor acceptable in a democracy.

3. The Right to Criticize Foreign Governments

The First Amendment also ensures our right to critique foreign governments, especially regarding war crimes and human rights violations. This bill threatens to stifle legitimate discourse on atrocities abroad, silencing Ohioans and Americans who engage in critical global conversations. The ability to speak out against injustice is fundamental to who we are as a nation, and we cannot allow this bill to jeopardize that right.

Call to Action

I urge you to reconsider Senate Bill 297. It is redundant, unconstitutional, and harmful to free speech. Let us uphold the principles of the First Amendment and avoid creating unnecessary legal barriers. Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.

END