

**Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee**  
**December 10, 2024**  
**Testimony in Opposition for SB 297**  
**Miriam Saab**

**Dear Members of the Ohio State Judiciary Committee,**

In the midst of an internationally recognized genocide — a genocide that this very state has contributed millions upon millions of dollars to, staining the hands of every single Ohioan with the blood of Palestinian children, mothers, and fathers — Ohio’s priorities lie in suppressing dissenting voices and restricting the very rights enshrined to all citizens in the United States Constitution. Senate Bill 297 claims to “expand offense of ethnic intimidation,” but fails to acknowledge the recent spikes in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hate crimes that have similarly been on the rise following October 7th, 2023. They are conveniently left out of this legislation. Does the life of Wadea Al Fayoume, the six-year-old Palestinian child brutally murdered in Chicago last year, just a few states over, not carry the same weight of other American children? Are the lives and futures of Hisham Awartani, Tahseen Ali Ahmad, and Kinnan Abdalhamid, victims of an anti-Palestinian shooting in Vermont, not valued the same as other American students?

The implications of SB 297 deeply concern me, as a pro-Palestinian organizer, student, and lifelong Ohio resident. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition of antisemitism, used in this bill, dangerously and falsely conflates anti-zionism with antisemitism, deeming any criticism on israel as antisemitic. Merely sharing my family’s stories, the violent attacks on their human rights, their land, and their lives, is deemed antisemitic. Calling on my state and my university to stop investing in blood money is considered antisemitic. Standing on my campus, a public university, and bringing attention to the unequal treatment of Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims, and anti-genocide students is considered antisemitic.

I personally know many Palestinian, anti-zionist Jewish, and anti-genocide students at the Ohio State University and other Ohio colleges who have been subject to unrelenting harassment, doxxing, and death threats. University administration has repeatedly claimed to support students during these situations, yet Palestinian and anti-genocide students have continuously been ignored and pushed to the side. University administrative staff themselves have been involved in

discriminatory and repressive practices, restricting the time, place, and ways students are allowed to freely practice their right to free speech and expression — oftentimes, fabricating false policies and rules nowhere to be seen in or reasonably concluded from university policy. This bill claims to protect against these infringements, but fails to outline any real measures of protection. In fact, it explicitly permits public universities to continue their restrictions on freedom of speech.

As I stand here today, I urge everyone to reflect on the legacy SB 297 will leave if passed. Need I remind you all of the brutal Kent State massacre that happened 54-years-ago, just over 100 miles from here? Students peacefully protesting America's involvement in the Vietnam War were ruthlessly targeted by the National Guard, just as students peacefully protesting America's involvement in the ongoing genocide in Gaza have been viciously attacked in Ohio and across the nation. The Kent State massacre, a dark moment in America's history, a bloody blemish on Ohio's history, has come back to haunt us. I was present at the encampment at Ohio State last April. I witnessed officers choking students and dragging their unconscious bodies across the lawn. Helicopters surveilled me while I prayed as officers prepared to charge despite calls to "let us pray." We prayed Qunut Nazilah, a prayer only used during times of war, because that is how unsafe and threatening our campus was at that moment.

This moment, and the treatment of anti-genocide students in Columbus, in Ohio, and across the nation, will too be a stain on this state's history like the Kent State massacre. SB 297 will taint this state's history. This will be its legacy: certain lives are valued over others, and certain people are privileged to rights and protections denied to others. I urge you all to stand in your humanity and condemn this bill, and the discrimination and suppression it legitimizes. Freedom is nothing, if not for all.