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## Opponent Testimony SB 297

There is a huge whopper within the text of S.B. 297 and that is the statement that “The definition of ‘antisemitism’ in this section shall not be construed to diminish or infringe on any right protected by the first amendment to the United States Constitution or the Ohio Constitution.”

Of course, S.B. 297 does exactly that.

S.B 297 is a direct effort to clamp down on political speech regarding the actions of Israel. This bill weaponizes the charge of antisemitism and makes pure political speech a crime with draconian penalties.

Most stunning of all in this attack on free speech is it appoints an outside group to define what “antisemitism” is. Let me repeat that. This body is outsourcing to another group its basic responsibility to define what violates this law.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) may be a wonderful group but they are an international group directly funded by some 35 governments around the world. In other words this body has abdicated its responsibilities by allowing an instrument of other governments determine if an American has engaged in hate speech.

The basic rights of American citizens should not be outsourced to such an entity which is not under the direct control of this body.

The lawyers among you must recognize that this bill is a bridge too far in that it amounts to a total abdication of this body’s responsibility to define antisemitism.

It is also a step too fast and too expensive because the U.S. Senate has not yet considered nearly identical legislation which will surely be tested in the courts.

We recognize that defining the real scourge of antisemitism is difficult but is legally necessary for this group.

It’s noteworthy that many leading Jewish groups and thinkers around the world disagree with parts of the IRHA definition of antisemitism. Three of those contentious elements are the following:

- Denying the Jewish people their right of self determination, e.g. by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.

Many residents of Ohio recognize that this is not just a bill drafted by those who wish to shield Israel from valid criticism but also to clamp down on potential demonstrations as the world views Gaza and now Lebanon in horror. It is clearly meant to hamper college or high school students from exercising their First Amendment rights.

Those are the voices S. B. 297 is meant to silence.