

December 10, 2024

Hello Senators,

My name is Darcy Orzan and I'm a lifelong Ohioan who happens to be Jewish. I understand that SB 297 has been written to protect me as a Jewish Ohioan from ever experiencing antisemitism. Now, THAT would be amazing! Unrealistic, but amazing, nonetheless. I've tried to research to see if any of you senators are, yourselves, Jewish. I haven't found anything that tells of your faith, but I don't believe any of you are. (Please forgive me if I assumed it incorrectly.) This leads me to believe that not one of you has ever experienced antisemitism. I have. My children have. Here are some examples:

1. When I was at the University of Toledo in 1989, I went to sit at the desk I always sat at in my history class. There was a swastika drawn on it. This is antisemitism.
2. When I was at Cleveland State University in the early 1990s and dating my now ex-husband (who is not Jewish), his fraternity brothers left a message on the white board that I'd called. The message said, "Mike, Call 1-800-HEBREW." This is antisemitism.
3. One day, when one of my kids was in middle school, a classmate came up to him and told him this joke: What do pizza and Jews have in common? They both come out of the oven. This is antisemitism.
4. Then I went to the middle school the next day to speak with the principal. I brought pictures from the Holocaust of real Jews with arms coming out of ovens to show him as I told him what happened. I told him that the classmate needed to be punished and that they needed to start teaching about the Holocaust. Nothing happened. That is antisemitism.
5. When my youngest was a junior in high school, they were at their locker after AP Government class. Their locker was at the end of a row next to an alcove where the AP Gov teacher (I'll call him Teacher G) was talking with another Social Studies teacher (I'll call him Teacher S). My child heard the following conversation between the two teachers:

Teacher S: What did you guys talk about today?

Teacher G: Cancel culture and cancelling JUULS.

Teacher S: What did you just say?

Teacher G: We talked about cancelling JUULS, the vape product.

Teacher S: Ohhhhh. I thought you said cancelling Jews. But that would be okay too. But maybe not since we just got two days off because of their holidays.

My child went to math class literally shaking. THIS is antisemitism from a TEACHER within earshot of a JEWISH student. Unfortunately, no one else heard it. We reported it. And you guessed it... no disciplinary action against the teacher. NONE.

Do you know why these actions are considered antisemitic? They are antisemitic because they are hateful towards Jewish PEOPLE. People are not places. This leads me to the reason for my opposition of this bill.

Senate Bill 297 wants to use the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism and this bill's interpretation (read that again... interpretation, not truth) of this definition is to include speaking out against Israel. Israel is a place. It is not people, nor is it a people. Jews are a people. Judaism is a faith. Israel is a place.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's own website calls their definition of antisemitism a "... non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism..." This means that the definition is still being thought out, is not final, and is not to be held as a legal definition. Their site also states that **"criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic."** This is key, Senators. We Americans criticize our own country every day. Late night tv hosts, comedians, satirists make a living out of it. There's nothing more American than the freedom to criticize America. You do it, I do it, we all do it. And we do it because it's important. Unquestioned governments become dictatorships.

And critique is protected by the first amendment to the United States Constitution under Freedom of Speech. And under that same amendment comes the right of the people peaceably to assemble. This includes rallies and marches full of people, as well as sit-ins and encampments which are the most peaceful of all assemblies. We wouldn't have the Civil Rights Act of 1964 without the rallies, marches, and sit-ins. And remember, this was about our own government. Now this bill wants to do away with these rights for a foreign government. This makes no sense. I can criticize the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, the Peoples Republic of Congo, New Zealand, Nicaragua, you name it... just not Israel????

But I want to criticize Israel. I do criticize Israel. Every...single...day. And I'm Jewish. And I'm not antisemitic. And I will continue to criticize Israel for as long as I want because that is my right. It's everyone's right. And, interestingly, this very bill states 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."**

Senators, if you want to truly combat real antisemitism and discrimination of all kinds, this bill is not the right way. We need to start with well-thought-out and peer-researched educational programs in schools and start as young as possible.

Respectfully submitted,

Darcy Orzan  
Shaker Heights, Ohio