

Chair Powell and committee members, my name is Vicki Prunty and I'm testifying today because House Bill 291 deeply troubles me as an Ohioan who cares about people over profits and peace over war. This bill isn't just about trade. It's about embedding Ohio into a system that could harm vulnerable communities here and abroad. Let me explain why.

First, this commission would prioritize military technology partnerships with Israel, especially in cyber warfare and electronic weapons. That means Ohio's universities and research centers could become labs for developing tools used in surveillance or warfare. We've seen how these technologies can target civilians. Why should our state support that? Shouldn't we invest in technology that heals and connects people instead?

Second, the bill allows unlimited private funding with zero transparency. Think about that: foreign governments or defense contractors could bankroll this commission and steer Ohio policy behind closed doors. That's not democracy. That's a pay-to-play scheme where money talks louder than Ohio families. We deserve to know who's influencing decisions about our jobs and communities.

Third, singling out Israel. A country currently involved in war crimes, sends a terrible message. Palestinian Ohioans, Jewish peace advocates, and so many others are already hurting. Why would we prioritize a partnership that ignores their suffering? This isn't neutrality; it's taking a side in an ongoing humanitarian crisis.

And let's be practical: Israel's economy is faltering. Credit agencies downgraded it, investors are fleeing, and its tech sector is struggling. Why chain Ohio's future to instability? We've got schools needing funding, hospitals closing, and towns left behind. Shouldn't that come before risky foreign military ventures?

Finally, there's the sneaky threat of last-minute funding. If this commission gets tucked into the budget quietly, taxpayers could fund this forever with no debate. That's not how the government should work.

At its heart, this bill trades Ohio's moral standing for war tech partnerships. It risks making us complicit in harm while silencing ordinary citizens. I urge you: vote no on HB 291. Let's build an Ohio economy that lifts everyone up. Without secrecy, without militarization, and without ignoring the pain of our neighbors.