

Heather Cantino opponent testimony on HB 291

Dear Committee Chair Hoops and Development Committee members:

I urge you to reject HB 291, which would codify the permanent political influence by foreign nations over Ohio and Ohioans. This is contrary to our national interests and Ohio sovereignty and is especially dangerous because anti-BDS laws codified in ORC 9.76 could prevent future alteration or termination of the business relationship with Israel and thus make the dangerous influence by this particular foreign nation become permanent control over our state government. As an American Jew who has been horrified by the complicity of our federal and state government in Israel's ongoing destruction of Palestinian territories and starvation of the entire population of Gaza—now deemed genocide by numerous international bodies and international human rights laws— I stand in strong opposition to this dangerous sacrifice of Ohio's integrity and constitutional responsibilities.

This bill would open Ohio to become a tool of unregulated foreign lobbying and to being a puppet serving Israel's dangerous and increasingly deadly militarized foreign policy agendas.

I am particularly concerned by specifics of this dangerous legislation, including:

- A permanent seat on the commission for someone who represents “Israeli-American communities or interests.” Who decides this and what those interests are and whether they serve the public good?
- Specific emphasis on establishing joint cybersecurity and electronic warfare projects with Israel. This legislation would facilitate Israeli government and military contractor access to Ohio research infrastructure and create pipelines for companies like Anduril Industries (which builds AI-powered drones and surveillance towers) to collaborate on weapons systems, hypersonic missiles, or digital warfare tools. Even Ohio's public universities, labs, and agencies could become complicit in the global militarized surveillance economy without any public oversight or determination of compliance with US and international laws and constitutional obligations.
- Cybersecurity Threats: Israel's Pegasus spyware (NSO Group) was used to hack the phones of U.S. diplomats, journalists, and civil society leaders. Paragon's spyware tools (Graphite) have targeted European journalists. These technologies have been used without accountability, and this bill opens the door to unregulated tech exchange and experimentation in Ohio.
- Privacy & Oversight: There are no checks and balances in this bill to protect Ohioans' data, taxpayer dollars, or democratic processes. Ohio could be complicit in expanding surveillance tech used against activists, journalists, and communities abroad. HB 291 creates an international commission with no defined budget cap or performance goals.
- These elements give Israel privileged institutional access to influence Ohio's economy, technology development, and potentially even infrastructure policy.
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I am also very concerned by the pay-to-play provisions that make those with money and power able to direct Ohio's economy to become a war machine without any public accountability or oversight, regard for civil liberties or compliance with US and international law and constitutional mandates.

Allowing foreign governments control over Ohio's policies, economy and well-being is antithetical to American democracy and sovereignty..

Please vote NO on this very dangerous, unconstitutional and immoral, undemocratic legislation.

Heather Cantino  
SE Ohio Jewish Voice for Peace  
Athens