

## **Opponent Testimony on House Bill 291 Create the Ohio International Trade Commission**

Susanna Whitman – Resident

Before the House Development Committee

6/17/2025

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chairman Lorenz, Ranking Member Abdullahi, and esteemed members of the House Development Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to House Bill 291.

My name is Susanna Whitman, and I am writing to express my deep concern about the direction and implications of this proposed legislation. While framed as an economic development initiative, this bill raises serious questions regarding transparency, accountability, public input, and complicity in international human rights violations—specifically in relation to Israel.

A trade commission with Israel would lock Ohio into partnership with a country that the International Court of Justice has found to be in [violation of international law](#) and leading human rights organizations accuse of [genocide](#). Israel's war on Gaza has led to the deaths of over 55,000 Palestinians and has repeatedly targeted hospitals, journalists, and humanitarian workers, devastating medical infrastructure and humanitarian [conditions](#).

Ohio's anti-Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) law (ORC 9.76) dangerously compounds the risks of this partnership. It could shield the Commission from democratic scrutiny by labeling any future attempts to scale back the partnership as “discriminatory” or “antisemitic”. For example, Ohio Attorney General has previously [threatened](#) that county treasurers are in violation of the anti-BDS law if they do not reinvest in Israel Bonds. Once this commission is created, attempts to limit or change it could be met with similar statements. Meanwhile Israel's credit rating has been downgraded multiple times and remains at risk of further [decline](#) under strain from its prolonged military campaign. This is not a sound economic partner—it is politically volatile and fiscally unstable.

Section G allows “individuals, corporations, foundations, governmental agencies, and public and private organizations” to fund the Commission, meaning private or foreign interests could end up directing public trade policy. At a time when our state faces needs in healthcare, infrastructure, and education, HB 291 proposes diverting state resources toward international tech ventures with no guarantees of benefit to Ohio's working families or small businesses, no clear metrics for success, no financial transparency, and no protections against donor influence.

I urge you to vote no on House Bill 291. Thank you.