

**Dear Development Committee,**

My name is **Raúl Montejo**, a resident of **Cleveland Heights**, and I strongly oppose **HB 188**. This bill would allocate **\$10 million of taxpayer funds** to create the **Ohio-Israel Trade and Innovation Partnership** at a time when our communities in Ohio are experiencing severe cuts to essential services like **libraries, schools, healthcare, and public transit**.

As an **independent IT professional and community organizer** focused on human rights and economic justice, I am deeply troubled by the notion that our state would prioritize funding for foreign partnerships over the pressing needs of everyday Ohioans. While families in Ohio struggle to feed their children and access educational resources, our government considers funneling millions into international projects that do not serve our local interests.

The dropout in literacy rates and the increase in homelessness are signs of the economic hardship many Ohioans are facing. Our local schools and social programs are vital for educating the next generation and ensuring access to reliable public transportation. Instead of investing in initiatives that would support our community's economic recovery, this bill risks compounding our challenges by diverting important funds into a foreign partnership.

Additionally, the **creation of this commission** raises significant ethical concerns. It not only excludes dissenting voices—including Palestinian, Arab-American, and Muslim communities—but also lacks **transparency and oversight**. Allocating such funds through **JobsOhio**, a private nonprofit already criticized for its transparency issues, further reduces public accountability, creating avenues for potential misuse or misdirection of our tax dollars.

With Israel's ongoing human rights violations and the current political climate complicating its relationships, investing taxpayer money in these initiatives places Ohio in a morally questionable position. We should be focusing on solutions that foster **equity and fiscal responsibility** for our community, not partnerships with state actors involved in acts of aggression.

I urge the committee to **vote NO on HB 188**. It is crucial that we preserve human rights and focus our state funds on the legitimate needs of Ohio residents, rather than support foreign lobbying efforts.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,  
**Raúl Montejo**  
**Cleveland Heights, OH**