

To the Members of the Ohio State Legislature,

My name is Josephine Guilbeau, a 17-year Army Veteran and former Intelligence Officer. I swore an oath to defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic, believing threats to freedom would come from abroad. I never imagined those threats could come from our own government, yet Ohio Senate Bill 87 represents exactly that danger. The IHRA definition it codifies is clear overreach, violating our rights to free speech and expression. Kenneth Stern, one of its lead authors, admitted that “the working definition has been primarily used (and I argue, grossly abused) to suppress and chill pro-Palestinian speech”—and indeed it has.

This bill, sponsored by Senator Terry Johnson and cosponsored by Senators Cirino, Lang, Schaffer, empowers the state to police speech in ways that could criminalize religious expression, discussion, and teaching — including Scripture central to my Catholic faith. In such political climates, I also question how often you met with foreign lobbying groups, such as AIPAC or its affiliated organizations, before introducing this bill.

As a Catholic, my faith relies on Scripture — including passages IHRA would label “antisemitic.” Under this bill, honest discussion of these texts could be misinterpreted as punishable speech. For example:

1 Thessalonians 2:14: “...the Jews killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone.”

and

Matthew 23:27-28: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, beautiful on the outside, but full of the bones of the dead inside... on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

I urge you to read these passages for self-reflection.

It is also critical to clarify that Catholics do not equate Zionism with Judaism. The modern state of Israel is a political entity, established in the 20th century, and is not mandated in Scripture. Equating Zionism with the Jewish faith misrepresents both our faith and the Jewish people. Since the Holocaust, Zionism has contributed to persecution of Jews and the genocide of Palestinians. According to the Washington Post, 61% of American Jews believe Israel has committed war crimes in Gaza. Under this bill, anyone— even Jews — speaking against Zionist actions could be criminalized.

For nearly two decades, I believed I was defending freedom — including conscience, speech, and religious liberty. If this bill passes, those freedoms are at risk at home.

No law you pass can silence the faithful. No statute can erase the Word of God from our hearts. If defending the right to worship, teach, and live by conscience brings persecution or even the threat of death, I stand ready, as thousands of saints and Christians have before me. As the early Christians declared, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). We will not be silenced. Christians, Jews, and Muslims stand shoulder to shoulder in solidarity against the Zionist empire and the genocide in Gaza

For these reasons — as a veteran, a Catholic, and an American — I urge you to vote against Ohio Senate Bill 87 and defend the religious freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Josephine Guilbeau