

Testimony: Oppose SB 87
Rachel Karpman, 10/18/2026

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and all members of the Senate Judiciary Committee: thank-you for the opportunity to speak here today. My name is Rachel Karpman, and I'm here to voice my opposition to SB 87.

I am a resident of Columbus, Ohio, and a proud member of the Jewish community. I am active in both synagogue life and interfaith organizing. The safety of my fellow Jews is deeply important to me. I am also painfully aware that Central Ohio has an anti-Semitism problem. Since moving here in 2016, I have witnessed alt-right militants waving Nazi flags in downtown Columbus, and I have lived in a neighborhood that was frequently vandalized with anti-Semitic flyers, some calling for the murder of Jews.

Given my background, you might expect me to support SB 87, which purports to fight anti-Semitism. However, I believe that SB 87 represents a counter-productive approach which would be harmful to everyone in Ohio—including the Jewish community.

SB 87 aims to enshrine the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism into Ohio law. I believe that this is a dangerous overreach. As the IHRA clearly states on their website, their definition of anti-Semitism was never intended to be legally binding. The IHRA criteria for what constitutes anti-Semitic acts are broad and open to interpretation. This may be appropriate for a self-described “working document,” which aims to help readers think through the many ways anti-Semitism can manifest. However, it lacks the precision needed for a legal definition, which must be applied fairly and consistently to all.

Perhaps most troubling, the IRHA definition conflates criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. The IHRA lists eleven examples of anti-Semitic conduct as part of its working definition. Several of these specifically reference criticism of the State of Israel or its government. Like many Jews, I feel strongly that criticism of Israel is not inherently anti-Semitic. The IHRA definition does not represent a consensus among the Jewish community, nor among experts on anti-Semitism. As an example, the Jerusalem Declaration on anti-Semitism, signed by 370 scholars in anti-Semitism and related fields, aims to respond to the IHRA definition and explicitly states that even strident criticism of Israel is not anti-Semitic.

If SB 87 becomes law, legitimate criticism of Israel could be legally classified as anti-Semitism, and even prosecuted as ethnic intimidation. Hence SB 87 represents a direct threat to civil liberties in Ohio. Over the past year, we have seen multiple high-profile national cases where accusations of anti-Semitism were used to harass, intimidate, and even detain activists who criticized Israel. Even if SB 87 is applied in a fair and thoughtful manner, fear of overzealous enforcement will create a chilling effect on political activism, and prevent Ohioans from exercising their constitutional right to free speech. This is unacceptable and dangerous.

As Benjamin Franklin famously said, "They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety." We cannot keep the Jewish community safe by attacking civil liberties and banning dissent. Such measures weaponize Jewish fears and pit us against our neighbors, leaving our communities more divided, less safe, and less free. I urge the committee to reject SB 87, and commit to supporting free speech and civil liberties for everyone in Ohio. Thank you.