

Thank you, chairperson and committee. I am Rev. Rick Behrens, Pastor of Grandview Park Presbyterian Church in Kansas City, Kansas and a lifelong resident of Kansas City, Kansas. I'm concerned about this bill as it infringes on the free exercise of religion and faith speech. For over a year we had a smashed nativity scene in our sanctuary. The broken barn and manger and mutilated characters represented the people of Gaza who had been under attack. Each Sunday we prayed for a cease fire, we prayed that the innocents in Gaza would be protected, just as we prayed for the innocents in Israel who had suffered as a result of the Hamas attack. Under this bill, it is possible that I and others in our congregation could be charged. Faith communities like ours everywhere pray for and support all people under attack and under the threat of violence. When we stand up and speak up for innocent civilians in Palestine, it is not anti-semitic. "We criticize Israel when we feel it deserves it, just as we would any other state. We are not singling it out, nor are we criticizing Jews as a whole. We have a right to stand up and speak up for people who are suffering regardless of their race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. This bill actually functions to control speech which calls for moral clarity. I am opposed.