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Bill Information

Bill Number: HB 2299

Position: Opponent

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Written Testimony

I am writing to express my opposition to HB 2299 and the negative impact it will have on local, national, and global communities. My opposition towards HB2299 is specific towards the bill's decision to adhere to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism, which does not combat the very real issue of antisemitism, threatens American's first amendment rights, and is wildly discriminatory towards Palestinian people's fight for self-determination.

While the IHRA that "criticism of Israel, similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitism," the same text later labels "drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis" as an act of antisemitism along with "applying double standards by requiring behavior not expected or demanded by any other democratic nation." The harm that the Nazi regime caused on mankind, especially Jewish people, is intolerable and will forever be held as a benchmark for the depravity authority can have towards subjects, and the amount of depravity a population can tolerate out of fear or complacency. In remembrance of the Holocaust, all nations, including Israel, should be held to the standard that a genocide at the scale of the Holocaust, will never be repeated. The Holocaust perpetuated by Nazi Germany was not complete overnight, but through a series of actions slowly stripping away the rights of Jewish people, LGBTQ people, dissenters, and other marginalized peoples. With this in mind, it is fair for any country's policies, including Israeli policies, to be judged against that of the Nazi to prevent another genocide of mankind. Over the last 48 years, Israel's illegal settlements in the West Bank, indiscriminate bombing of Gaza, targeting of journalists, targeting of educational

systems, targeting of hospitals, blockade of aid, and the detention of women, children, men, and elderly are all signs of an ongoing genocide which have been brought to the attention of international justice systems. Addressing the ongoing humanitarian disaster caused by Israel, is not an act of antisemitism. Rather it is continuing the remembrance of the Holocaust, to prevent future genocide, no matter the perpetrator.

Jewish Voices for Peace suggests a more sensible approach towards the issue of antisemitism and Holocaust remembrance in contrast to definition set out by HB2299 and the IHRA. Israel, Zionism, and Jewish identity is difficult to distinguish for many, especially after 48 years of conditioning in America. Israel is the nation state that occupies a land area, once home to Palestinian peoples. Zionism is the belief, founded on ideas of imperialism which was dominant in Europe at the time of its creation, that the creation of a Jewish ethno-state is the only solution for Jewish safety. Lastly, Jewish identity represents deep cultural traditions and diverse voices outside of that expressed by Zionism and can exist anywhere in the world. While the IHRA definition of antisemitism makes no mention of Zionism, its equating of Jewishness to the state of Israel is a Zionist belief. Perhaps, the reference to the word 'Zionism' is left out of the text because of genocidal and 20th century imperialism undertones attached to the belief. Jewish Voices for Peace argues that the equivalence of Jewish people to Zionism and the present Israeli state poses a greater threat towards Jewish people's safety, than criticism of Israeli policy, even if criticism makes comparisons between genocidal actions of the Israeli state and Nazi Germany. As Israel continues to carry out its violence on Palestinians, as it did for the 47 years prior to October 7th, 2023, it is important to hold the Israeli government accountable, as well as its funders, mainly the United States. Vague language presented in the IHRA and HB2299, blurs the lines of criticism of Israel with antisemitic speech and gathering. HB2299 equates all Jewish people with present day Israeli violence and genocide, creating a target on Jewish identity, when it is Zionism and Israeli actions that are being challenged. Throughout history, European countries and the US have refused to provide safety for Jewish people and instead used the creation of Israel to export the so-called "Jewish problem," leading to the ongoing displacement of Palestinian families. In this time, there is a great opportunity to affirm Jewish identity, safety, and global peace. Instead HB2299, continues the legacy of antisemitism in this country and the western world, by exporting Jewish identity as Zionism by adopting the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

The consequences of the passing of HB2299, reaches far beyond Jewish and Palestinian safety. The passing of HB2299, will further inhibit first amendment rights of Americans to free speech, press, and assembly. In its most recent offensive, Israel killed 161 journalists from Gaza and 6 journalists from Lebanon, during the 1.5 year period. To put into perspective, 60 journalists were killed during the 20 year war in Vietnam. While Israel kills journalists alongside civilians, American legislators attempt to pass legislation silencing those who are bothered by indiscriminate killings and displacement. As argued, the IHRA definition of antisemitism is incredibly blurred, allowing Israel to avoid accountability in destabilizing the region, while creating an environment of hostility for Jewish people by protecting Israel's refusal to abide by international standards and accept criticism. The American public has a right to argue against arming and funding of Israel, especially when American tax, business, and education expenses are major funders of an ongoing genocide. To limit freedom of speech, freedom of press, and

freedom to assemble, based on a biased definition of antisemitism, is simply un-American. I am afraid that with the passing of HB2299, the cycle of extreme violence will continue abroad, as there is no accountability from Israel's greatest enablers, as well as domestically, because HB2299 restricts healthy outlets for discussion, expression of opinion, and mutual understanding, due to its reliance on solely the IHRA in defining antisemitism.

I present my opposition to HB2299 today, as a concerned citizen and active member in my community in Kansas. Working as a mental health professional and first responder in one of Kansas' four federally recognized Native American tribes, I see every day the impact genocide and displacement, carried out by American policy, has on Indigenous relatives. My Christian upbringing gives me some insight to why many individuals see the Israeli state as the equivalent to the holy land, above the laws set by man, as I once did. For most of my life, I too was unaware, silent, and complacent to the crimes against humanity being perpetrated by the Israeli offensive long before October 7, 2023. My Christian upbringing also allows me to see the plight of Jews, Palestinians, and Americans wanting to end the cycle of violence caused by Zionism. As an ethnically Chinese person, it is easy for me to distinguish between Sinophobia, and being against Chinese policy, China, or Chinese Nationalism, as I often fall into the latter category. Proposed legislations, like HB2299, pose a danger to society as it equates the criticism of genocidal actions of Israel to be antisemitic in nature. As a descendant of White Terror survivors in Taiwan, I am alarmed by the willingness of local American legislatures to limit freedom of speech, freedom of press, and freedom of expression, in an attempt to appease a violent foreign regime. For context, White Terror, lasting 42 years, was a Chinese Nationalist authoritarian regime that carried out mass censorship, mass incarceration, and extrajudicial killings, all with the support of American aid. When criticized, the Chinese Nationalist Party, which survives to this day, has dismissed its actions against local Taiwanese inhabitants because 'they were not committing Holocaust level atrocities like the Nazis in Germany.' Adopting HB2299 creates a dangerous environment that suppresses dissent and critical thinking by allowing free speech, free press, and free expression to be inappropriately labeled as acts of antisemitism based on the definition given by the IHRA. It is absolutely heinous for the Kansas House to attempt to pass legislation limiting Americans rights to dissent, in a time when the world has just witnessed the live stream American funded genocide; a war on press workers, civilians, first responders, aid workers, healthcare workers; a forced starvation of millions; the continued displacement of people; all under the guise of fighting discrimination.

Sources:

<https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>

<https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/2023/11/09/antisemitism-dangerous/>

<https://cpj.org/2025/02/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/>

Signature

Alex Wang

February 9, 2025