

From: [Haidee](#)
To: [House Education](#); [Susan Estes](#)
Subject: Testimony for HB2299
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Personal Information

Full Name: Haidee Clauer

Email Address: hkclauer@gmail.com

Bill Information

Bill Number: HB 2299

Position: Opponent

Date of Hearing: Tuesday, February 11, 2025, 1:30 PM

Written Testimony

Dear Kansas Legislators,

This testimony urges you to vote against HB 2299. I am writing to you on behalf of myself, a community member who spent my entire childhood in Jewish school, synagogue, and youth group in Kansas, and my family members, who are deeply rooted members of Kansas City's Jewish community.

We testify that this bill adopting the IHRA resolution of antisemitism into state law *will not make Jews safer*. HB299 would codify the IHRA's "contemporary examples" -- several of which conflate and confuse legitimate analysis and criticism of the Israeli government with antisemitism, and would criminalize valid and necessary political discussion, academic discourse, and free speech. In academic institutions that have codified the IHRA and its contemporary examples, they have been used to stifle student events, bar professors from campuses, and as a basis to rescind job offers to professors who have written papers critical of the Israeli government. The adoption of the IHRA definition is dangerous for any institution, and it is alarming that the state of Kansas could adopt legislation that would, as my Bubbe noted, would stifle academic discourse and critical inquiry. "It flies in the face of freedom of speech."

Moreover, the specification in HB299 that "wearing a mask" could be taken as antisemitism is astoundingly dangerous. It is well within your constituents' rights to attend protests, demonstrations, lectures, campus events, and any public space with a mask on. This legislation could threaten students' ability to protect themselves from health risks as well as their right to privacy and protest.

I would also like to include a Guest Commentary I wrote for the KC Star with help from my bubbe, in opposition to similar bills passing through the MO Legislature. I urge you to read it. I am attaching both a link and the text below:

<https://www.kansascity.com/opinion/readers-opinion/guest-commentary/article299302414.html#storylink=cpy>

Missouri leaders falsely confuse criticism of Israel's government with antisemitism | Opinion

Missouri's legislature is considering bills to conflate legitimate criticism of the Israeli government with antisemitism. They'd advance censorship, not safety.

For over 15 months, thousands of Kansas Citians, including nearly 10,000 Palestinians, have watched devastation unfold in Gaza. Many, including those who have lost hundreds of family members, have tirelessly organized fundraisers, support for a life-saving ceasefire and release of all hostages, and phonebanks hundreds of days in a row to end U.S. complicity in these atrocities.

Alongside Palestinian community leaders and allies, Jewish organizers have been a consistent force in local movements for a ceasefire and Palestinian liberation and self-determination. We have stood together, including members of Jewish Voice for Peace, Rabbis for Ceasefire, and hundreds of concerned individuals statewide. Some of us mobilize because we witnessed the brutality of the occupation firsthand in Palestine. Some because our ancestors who survived the Holocaust raised us under the refrain "never again," and that legacy compels us to act now. We witness [scenes from Gaza](#) and cannot conscionably allow any government to enable or normalize them.

Like most Jews throughout time, our Judaism flourishes distinct from the modern nation state of Israel.

But now, Missouri is considering bills that would flatten this distinction. [HB746](#) and [HB937](#) would adopt a definition of antisemitism that has been widely criticized, [including by one its authors](#), as a dangerous conflation of antisemitism and criticism of Israel.

If adopted, Missouri educational institutions would be required to add this [IHRA definition](#) into codes of conduct as a basis for investigating suspected acts of antisemitism. Alarming, this includes so-called '[examples](#)' of antisemitism, most

involving criticism of the Israeli State. Under these bills, the discussion of Palestinians' lived experiences, academic findings critical of Israel, or even quotes from Israelis that condemn the Israeli Government could all be considered "prohibited conduct as it relates specifically to antisemitism." They could lead to student suspensions and loss of scholarships, faculty denial of tenure, loss of research funding or firing, and defunding student organizations. All while doing nothing to make Jewish communities safer, as the bills claim to do.

What's at Stake

Codifying the IHRA definition is dangerous in multiple ways. For one, [as its author noted](#), adopting legal definitions for types of bigotry is extremely rare and dampens institutions' abilities to address uncommon instances of hate. Imagine defining a comprehensive list of examples of racism or homophobia. How could a state government account for every dynamic and often intersectional form of hate?

After adopting the IHRA definition, [Florida](#) and [Cornell](#) began tracking and banning course syllabi that were particularly critical of Israel. At the University of Minnesota, a Holocaust historian's job offer was [rescinded over his criticism of Israel](#). At NYU, Jewish professors were [barred from campus](#) for protesting the Israeli government's violence in Gaza. Across UK universities, [one study](#) found 40 cases of Israel-specific complaints, including threats of legal action and attempts to cancel events.

Missouri students and educators now fear that this language conflating anti-Zionism with antisemitism would contradict the bill's stated intent to reduce antisemitism and stifle student groups who want to speak freely in opposition to the state of Israel. Haidee's Jewish grandmother, who taught Middle Eastern history for over 50 years in Missouri, is one of them. "The bill would stifle academic discourse and critical inquiry," she says. "It flies in the face of freedom of speech."

In 2024, statewide educational institutions saw hundreds of students demonstrating non-violently against the killing, starvation, and displacement of millions of Palestinian people by Israel. With the goal of uplifting Palestinians' struggle for freedom, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapters at UMKC and Mizzou work towards cross-cutting solidarity against all forms of hate. Through workshops, pamphlets, and campus discussions, Missouri SJP groups assert that holding the Israeli government accountable is necessary -- and cannot be used to antagonize Jewish people.

Despite this, student groups have repeatedly faced attempts to [vilify](#) and [shut down](#) their events through false accusations of antisemitism. With HB746/HB937 weaponized against them, student groups will not be able to conduct the necessary conversations, education, and advocacy work that academic institutions should cultivate. Palestinian students who have been directly impacted by Israeli violence will be heavily censored, silenced, and punished for simply speaking out about their lived experience.

Last May, Jewish organizers went to KC City Hall to oppose a similar resolution, alongside Palestinians, rabbis, and a packed house of concerned community members. For the first time in a five-month ceasefire campaign, one of us was singled

out for being Jewish, as an oppositional Christian Zionist pulled them aside and tried to convert them to Christianity. This is the absurdity the IHRA definition as cited in HB746 and HB937: it targets criticism of the Israeli government but *not* attempts to convert Jews from Judaism. The irony grows starker as we see main proponents of the IHRA definition [publicly defending Elon Musk's nazi salute](#) and introduce policy to [deport student activists](#).

This year will mark the decade anniversary of the deadly attack perpetrated by a neo-Nazi on KC's Jewish Community Center and Village Shalom. Jewish and Palestinian organizers will continue to work to build solidarity in the face of hate. It is appalling that our state legislature could conflate our activism against the violence and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Israel with real, vicious antisemitism. This is not the time to lose sight of very real threats to Jewish communities statewide.

Multi-generational, multi-racial, interfaith organizing has taught us that dismantling hate is not a project of pigeon-holing individual identity groups. We do not need a policy regime that conflates criticism of state and military policy with hate; we need tangible action to identify and address instances of substantive hate in any and all forms.

As community members, we urge Missouri legislators to reject HB746 and HB937. Our free speech, and our lives, are at stake.

<https://www.kansascity.com/opinion/readers-opinion/guest-commentary/article299302414.html>

Signature

Full Name (Typed): Haidee Clauer
Date: 2/9/25