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Bill Number: HB 2299

Position: Opponent

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Good afternoon, my name is Lauren Kimball, and I am both a college professor and a constituent of Johnson County, Kansas.

I want to begin by letting you know that I am fiercely protective of all my students, regardless of their age, ethnicity, religion, race, gender identity, or political orientation and stand firmly against anyone who would discriminate against any of them based on their identities.

Upon reviewing the language of this bill, it is clear to me that this legislation has less, if anything, to do with protecting individual rights than to intimidate and suppress the freedom of speech guaranteed to educators and students under the first amendment of our constitution.

On page 2, lines 21-27, this bill adopts the definition of antisemitism as defined by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition, a definition that, according to their own website, includes criticism that targets the state of Israel.

As a matter of personal principle, I do not teach nor express my politics in the classroom. However, as an art professor, I can attest to the deep empathy and compassion that is expressed by many of my students. Several of my students have been vocal about the crimes against humanity that have been perpetrated upon the civilians in Gaza, actions that have been condemned by the International Criminal Court as human rights violations including the indiscriminate bombing of hospitals, schools, and refugee camps.

Their opposition has nothing to do with slandering religions or ethnicities, and everything to do with their tender hearts, compassion, and desire to change the world for the better. Several of these students are themselves Jewish and are compelled by their faith in God to speak out against atrocity no matter who perpetrates it.

Am I to believe that the state of Kansas will charge Jewish students with antisemitism for speaking out against war crimes by a foreign nation, simply because that nation-state identifies as Jewish? With that logic, will you be charging students with discrimination for speaking out against human rights violations perpetrated by Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan because those countries identify as Muslim? Why are we legislating protections for foreign countries against American citizens?

Artists carry on a timeless legacy of speaking truth to power through their work – of capturing and expressing the hope, pain, grief, love, and lived experiences of history through their visual narratives and artistic expression. In these United States, we teach our children that the legacy of our nation is defined by liberty and justice for all – yet there can be no liberty where freedom of speech is suppressed, and there is no justice where our youth are silenced from speaking out against injustice.

I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Lauren Kimball

Associate Professor of Animation