

**From:** [Sophia Terian](#)  
**To:** [House Education](#)  
**Subject:** HB 2299 - Opponent - Written-Only Testimony  
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**To The Kansas State House of Representatives**  
Topeka, KS

**I have a story to tell you today—one that connects our great state of Kansas to a girl aspiring to a PhD, to an innocent family becoming refugees in Jerusalem, to the fundamental American right to free speech that is now under threat.**

My name is Sophie. I was born and raised in Kansas, and I am proud of my state and the education it has provided me. I received a full-ride scholarship to KU for my undergraduate degree and am now working on a PhD so I can give back to my home. I love this state, and I want to see it thrive.

But well before I was born in this great state, my grandfather was an Armenian citizen of Jerusalem, where my family had lived for centuries. However, neither Jewish nor Arab, he and his family lost their home and became refugees in the Six-Day War of 1967. A family of eight went from living in a spacious home to sharing a single room in the Armenian convent, where, having been forcibly removed from all their savings, they stayed for more than a decade. They suffered deeply—not because of anything they had done, but because they were caught between the politics of powerful nations.

**Their story is a reminder that the impact of war and political conflict is felt most by ordinary people—those who have no say in the decisions that alter their lives, yet who bear the heaviest consequences. My family’s suffering was not caused by open discussion or debate; it was caused by the actions of governments operating without accountability. That is why we must allow open discussions about history and international affairs—because silencing debate does not prevent conflict, it only prevents us from understanding and addressing it. It is a massive overreach of the Kansas government to restrict the critique of a foreign nation, and deplorable to do so under the guise of preventing antisemitism.**

I have close friends who are Palestinian, and I have watched them grieve for family members caught in conflict. At the same time, my father has worked for Jewish Family Services in the KC area for more than ten years, helping the amazing Jewish community there, and we know they are suffering right now too. I reject antisemitism completely, just as I reject Islamophobia, racism, and all forms of discrimination. But this bill does not address discrimination equally—it prioritizes one group while ignoring others, using a vague definition of antisemitism that could be weaponized to silence political debate.

Below I outline three major reasons why this bill must be rejected: 1) this bill threatens free

speech and academic freedom, 2) this bill is a form of government overreach, and 3) this bill violates Kansas's values of protecting freedom.

1. Kansas has a proud tradition of protecting free speech—one of the most fundamental American values. HB 2299 adopts the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, which blurs the line between antisemitism and legitimate criticism of Israel as a state.

- Criticizing the policies of a foreign government is not the same as religious discrimination.
- Would Kansas lawmakers have supported silencing those who spoke out against South African apartheid? Against the Armenian Genocide?

Our public universities must remain places where students and faculty can speak freely, question government policies (ESPECIALLY those of foreign nations), and engage in open debate—without fear of government retaliation.

2. This bill also grants sweeping enforcement powers to the Kansas Attorney General, including:

- The ability to investigate any complaint related to “antisemitism” in education, no matter how vague.
- Subpoena powers to force individuals to turn over evidence.
- Civil penalties up to \$10,000 per violation, creating a financial incentive for unnecessary investigations.

This level of government control over speech in educational institutions is not conservative—it’s Big Government overreach. It is not the role of the government to police what can or cannot be said about foreign governments in Kansas classrooms. Kansas can do better than this!!

3. As someone who has benefited from Kansas public education, I want to see our universities continue to be places where diverse perspectives can be discussed openly. The Kansas I know and love stands for:

- Freedom of speech – without government interference.
- Equality in anti-discrimination laws – protecting all groups, not just one.
- Academic excellence – where students and faculty can engage in tough conversations without fear.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to vote against HB 2299. As a proud Kansan, a dedicated researcher, and someone whose family has lived through the consequences of war and displacement, I cannot support a bill that threatens the critique of foreign nations and government accountability.

I hope you will stand for the core Kansas and American values of free speech, fairness, and academic integrity.

Sincerely,  
Sophie Terian