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House Bill 2299 - Prohibiting discriminatory practices on the basis of religion at public educational institutions

Proponent

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Thank you, Chairwoman Estes and the Committee on Education for this opportunity to speak. My name is Robert Metz, I graduated this December from the University of Kansas, majoring in political science, and will be pursuing a Juris Doctorate next fall. In the wake of Hamas' October 7th barbaric attack on Israel, myself and thousands of Jewish students across the world bore witness to a wave of antisemitism spreading across even the most prestigious universities. As a proud Jayhawk, I could only stand by as this same darkness reached my coveted campus.

It first began when the student-led organization, Students Supporting Israel, and other Jewish organizations on February 15th, 2023, hosted Gal Cohen-Solal, who came from Israel to share his harrowing experience of when Hamas slaughtered hundreds of people in Kibbutz Reim, where he lived. Students and families coming to the University of Kansas Memorial Union building were flanked by masked protestors, who harassed and recorded every person in attendance. Throughout Mr. Cohen-Solal's story, detailing how he had to hide his two young children and wife for 30 hours while Hamas terrorists were searching for them in their home, protestors would interrupt the event, spewing hate until the Lawrence Police arrested them. Attendees leaving the event had to be escorted to their cars by the police. I can still remember having protestors chanting "intifada revolution" as they followed me to my car. HB 2299 crucially prohibits the, "encouraging, supporting, praising, participating in or threatening violence or vandalism against Jewish people or property." Calling for an "intifada revolution", a direct reference to the widespread violence and terrorism during the First and Second Intifadas, is just one of the many violations this bill aims to protect Kansans from.

Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident on the University of Kansas campus. Students endured a human wall preventing them from entering classes, hordes of protestors entering buildings, classrooms, and libraries in order to disrupt and harass students, vandalism of university property, and some students were assaulted at night. Students who had attended Mr. Cohen-Solal's event had their photos, names, and personal details posted online, circulating across online groups. At one point, a picture of my apartment was shared over a University of Kansas social media group, threatening my roommates and I for having an Israel flag in our window.

On May 1st, 2023, these offenses culminated into an encampment in the center of campus, right outside of Fraser Hall, as members of anti-Israel groups congregated in order to cause further distress on campus during final exams. While I gave a final presentation, there were hundreds of masked protestors chanting over drums and speakers for the destruction of Israel, with little to no intervention by the university.

These are but a glimpse of the many stories of Jewish and non-Jewish students who were victims of the lawless fear mongering that has occurred since the start of the Israel-Hamas War on college campuses. As the University of Kansas has struggled to protect the emotional and physical wellbeing of students, faculty, and staff, it is evermore important that this esteemed institution brings accountability and decorum to public education. HB 2299 empowers the Attorney General to investigate acts of discrimination, providing a means of legal action for victims. I trust that this committee will ensure that the great state of Kansas will not tolerate hate, fear, and intimidation in its classrooms and campuses.