

Testimony Submission - Kansas House Bill 2299

Full Name: Lilly Mather

Organization (if applicable):

Email Address: lilithmather@gmail.com

Bill Information

Bill Number: HB 2299

Position: Opponent

Date of Hearing: February 7, 2025

Written Testimony

I strongly oppose HB. 2299 because it only violates American's right to free speech not only against our own government but a foreign government as well. Schools already have rules against discrimination such as antisemitism and this bill only seeks to silence those critical of a foreign government currently violating the Geneva Convention and violating international law.

The IHRA definition was never meant to be weaponized in a school setting. The author of Kenneth Stern said this on the IHRA definition "I wrote a definition of antisemitism. It was never meant to chill free speech on campus." The IHRA definition has been discredited by many scholars, human rights groups and academics.

Adopting this definition does not stop antisemitism, it only seeks to silence Palestinian-Americans and Pro-Palestinian advocacy. Discussing Palestine and the violent actions of the Israeli government is not in itself antisemitism. The true proponent of antisemitism is White Supremacy, yet this bill has no mention of white supremacy's role in creating hatred for not only the Jewish population but the Muslim and Arab-Americans in Kansas.

I implore you to oppose HB. 2299 and protect American's right to free speech that is currently under attack from the federal government.

Lilly Mather

Date: 02-07-2025

From: [Landon McGee](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: HB 2299 - Opponent - Written-Only Testimony
Date: Saturday, February 8, 2025 3:22:30 PM

Dear Kansas House Education Committee,

I am writing to you as an educator and a voter in Douglas County to oppose the HB 2299.

This bill, while it purports to be a defense against antisemitism, will in effect be aimed squarely at chilling and even censoring speech on our public college campuses, which educators and citizens across the state of Kansas hold up as forums for thoughtful and genuine disagreement. This is central to our ability to function as educational institutions.

Antisemitism, like any other form of religious, ethnic, or racial bigotry, is addressed through existing regimes of law—as well as the social responsibility that we feel as campus communities to protect our students. It is a profound error, however, to conflate, as this bill obviously does, antisemitism with any kind of robust criticism of the state of Israel. No nation state ought to be exempt from criticism, especially on college campuses where we attempt to honestly and carefully form criticisms of power, so that we might, as a country, exercise our own power in a way that lives up to an idea of human rights and equality that is inherent in the American project. To make an exception for the state of Israel, even above and beyond our own country, seems to me to be a grave error, one that is made due to fear more than any genuine concern for the safety of our Jewish students, many of whom themselves have made genuine criticisms of Israel.

Perhaps most worrying, the enforcement mechanisms for this bill, including empowering the Attorney General to bring charges directly against members of our campus communities for their speech, are ridiculous. I want to appeal specifically to the conservative members of the committee who have, in recent years, expressed concerns about the impingement of free speech on college campuses and online. This bill is a more genuine threat to free speech on Kansas campuses than anything we've seen in the past few years. To attempt to force agreement where there is disagreement on our campuses will not succeed—instead, it will solidify a view in the minds of students and teachers that the state of Kansas is not a place that takes open, free dialogue seriously, and harden some of the very opinions that this bill seeks to address.

As an educator, I want to make it clear: the state government needs to trust educators to do the educating in this state. We are experts who work tirelessly to build an environment where free inquiry and learning can happen, and any law that disrupts that environment, however well-intentioned, will only break down the complex, rich community that we are building for the future of Kansas. To threaten legal action against, in essence, reasonable and constitutionally protected speech, is beyond the pale. It evinces a naive confusion about how civil debate and inquiry really work—things that I would expect elected officials to understand.

I appreciate the opportunity to exercise my candor in this forum; thank you to the committee for hearing the voices of everyday Kansans. Again, I encourage you all to oppose the passage of HB 2299.

All my best,

Landon McGee
2/8/2025

Mackenzie McGee
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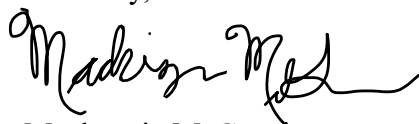
Dear Madame Chair and Committee,

I'm writing to you as an opponent of HB 2299. I've been teaching college writing for six years, and I'm currently an instructor at the University of Kansas. I believe this bill is unnecessary. I wholeheartedly agree that antisemitism is a danger to the Jewish people and should not be tolerated by any institution. However, there is nothing crucial in this bill that is not already enshrined in law. Further, KU already has a robust nondiscrimination policy, as well as processes for addressing discrimination when it occurs.¹

Two things about this bill disturb me: first is expanding the definition of antisemitism to include criticism of the state of Israel; second is deputizing the attorney general to investigate complaints. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance defines antisemitism, in part, as criticizing Israel as "a racist endeavor" and "drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis."² This language seems to target debates surrounding the Israel-Hamas War. This is a direct threat to free speech, as this bill would specifically forbid certain critiques from being discussed at all. The simple threat of the consequences outlined in this bill would force me to limit which viewpoints can be discussed in class, for fear that discussion might be interpreted as tolerance of these ideas. Importantly, although the bill attempts to make an exception for "coursework that is dedicated to the education and study of world religions or cultures,"³ this doesn't account for the many other courses in which students may benefit from discussion of opposing viewpoints, including writing classes. Part of my job is to help students think critically about different viewpoints, research them, and articulate their own responses. Restricting debate restricts my ability to teach these skills. The way this bill unnecessarily limits free speech through threat of legal action is counterproductive to the goals of my course and many others.

In conclusion, I urge you to vote against HB 2299. This unnecessary government overreach threatens free speech and prevents educators from doing our jobs effectively.

Sincerely,



Mackenzie McGee

¹ University of Kansas, Office of Civil Rights and Title IX. "Nondiscrimination, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action." *KU Policy Library*, <https://policy.ku.edu/IOA/nondiscrimination>.

² "Working definition of antisemitism," *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>.

³ Kansas State Legislature, House, Committee on Education. "House Bill No. 2299." *Kansas State Legislature*, https://www.kslegislature.gov/li/b2025_26/measures/documents/hb2299_00_0000.pdf.

From: [Nick McKee-Rist](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: HB 2299 - Opponent - Written-Testimony
Date: Monday, February 10, 2025 1:30:09 AM

Hello elected members of the Kansas House,

My name is Nick McKee-Rist, and I am a current Masters student at Kansas State University. I write today to express my deep concerns about HB 2299, which seeks to codify the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism into Kansas law. While combating antisemitism is a moral imperative, this bill risks weaponizing a flawed definition to silence constitutionally protected speech, particularly by students and organizers advocating for Palestinian human rights.

The IHRA definition includes examples that dangerously conflate criticism of the Israeli government with antisemitism. It suggests that statements such as “claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor” or “applying double standards” to Israel constitute antisemitism. Such vague and politically charged language could be used to suppress legitimate discussions about Israel’s policies in occupied Palestine, including its military operations in Gaza and systemic oppression of Palestinians. As a student who has spoken out against these injustices, I fear this bill would empower the Attorney General to target advocates like myself—not because we harbor hatred for Jewish people, but because we condemn human rights violations.

This concern is not unfounded. The IHRA definition has been widely criticized for its chilling effect on free speech, particularly regarding Palestinian rights. In 2023, a group of over 100 scholars, including Jewish and Israeli academics, signed a letter warning against the misuse of the IHRA definition, arguing that it has been deployed to suppress academic and political speech rather than address genuine antisemitism. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has also cautioned against the legal codification of the IHRA definition due to its potential for misuse. Similarly, groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) have opposed efforts to enshrine the IHRA definition into law, noting that it undermines the First Amendment by equating political critique with hate speech.

If enacted, this bill would allow the Attorney General to bring civil actions against individuals or groups accused of antisemitism under the IHRA definition. In practice, this could mean punishing students for hosting a lecture on Palestinian history, holding a vigil for Gaza’s victims, or advocating for Palestinian self-determination. Such measures would violate the First Amendment and create a climate of fear on campuses, where students must self-censor to avoid retaliation. The precedent set by this bill could extend far beyond the issue of Israel-Palestine, endangering broader academic freedom and political expression.

Meanwhile, the enforcement of such a law raises serious concerns about selective application. During my time at Kansas State, I witnessed far-right activist Jaden McNeil operate with impunity, despite his well-documented association with white nationalist figures. McNeil, a former K-State student, founded the “America First Students” group, an organization that openly promoted extreme right-wing nationalism and sought to align itself with the broader “America First” movement led by Nick Fuentes. Fuentes, an internet personality and political commentator, has repeatedly denied the Holocaust, calling it a “myth” and mocking the

number of Jewish people killed during World War II. He has also spread virulently racist, antisemitic, and misogynistic rhetoric, including stating that Jewish people have too much influence in American politics and openly calling for authoritarian rule in the United States.

Under HB 2299's framework, would the Attorney General investigate McNeil or others who platform neo-Nazis but avoid overt antisemitic speech? Or will this bill instead target students like me, who criticize Israel's apartheid system and military actions in Gaza? The double standard in how antisemitism is defined and enforced under this bill suggests that its true purpose is not to protect Jewish people but to insulate Israel from criticism.

Antisemitism is a serious issue that demands thoughtful solutions. However, HB 2299 is not the answer. It risks silencing marginalized voices, protecting apartheid, and undermining the constitutional rights of Kansans. Instead of adopting a definition that has been widely criticized for its weaponization against human rights advocacy, I urge you to reject this bill and instead focus on policies that combat all forms of bigotry without sacrificing free speech.

Nick McKee-Rist

Kansas State University | M.S Civil Engineering 2025

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Reverend Cerelia Martinez-Moylan

cmarmoy@proton.me

785-241-1942

Bill Number: HB 2299

Position: Opponent

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

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Cerelia Martinez-Moylan, and I have several concerns regarding HB 2299. My first concern is that the definition of anti-Semitism as stated in the bill is not a legally binding definition, per the IHRA themselves. I am also concerned with the Bill's equation of Jewish people and the Israeli state. I am a firm supporter of those in the Jewish faith, and have many friends and some family in the Jewish community. Jewish people should be protected. However, the government of Israel is not a person or protected class in itself. Americans should be allowed to exercise their freedom of speech regarding the state of Israel. It is important to me that all Americans are safe and protected, but I believe this Bill to be misguided in its execution.

Another concern I have is the section specifically regarding masks. The vague definitions leave too much room for misuse, especially with the rise of anti-masking sentiment. Respiratory illness is becoming an ever growing issue that affects the most vulnerable of our communities, and I worry this stipulation may harm everyday people trying to keep themselves and their families healthy as they go about their business. We know from history laws are not always enforced fairly and it is our duty to help reduce that risk wherever we can, for the good of all our citizens.

It is for these reasons I believe this Bill should go no further. I appreciate the Authors' intent to protect the Jewish community in Kansas, however, I do not believe HB 2299 is the appropriate way to accomplish this. Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Rev. Cerelia Martinez-Moylan

Reverend Cerelia Martinez-Moylan
02/09/2025

From: [Christopher Overfelt](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: HB 2299
Date: Monday, February 10, 2025 11:53:52 AM

My name is Christopher Overfelt. I live at 3121 w 44th ter KCK, 66103. My phone number is 913-530-2179. I would like to voice my dissent to the proposed Kansas House Bill 2299, which weaponizes the IHRA definition of antisemitism to silence Pro-Palestine activism in institutions. As a veteran, I value my freedom of expression, and I condemn any government legislation that attempts to limit it. The right to criticize any government is enshrined in our Bill of Rights. HB 2299 would criminalize and punish criticism of governmental policies as it equates criticism of Israel to antisemitism. Critical thinking and freedom of expression are not antisemitic. Please do not vote in favor of HB2299.

Thank You

From: [Samiya Irene](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: SAY NO TO HB 2299 Written Testimony
Date: Monday, February 10, 2025 2:12:42 AM

Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony to HB 2299. This bill cannot and should not pass the Kansas Legislature; it fundamentally conflicts with our rights to free speech and assembly. While there are certainly types of speech that should not be protected--this bill does not aim at protecting anyone.

Antisemitism CANNOT be tolerated, and yet this bill proposes conflating antisemitism and any critique or discussion of Israel. This is dangerous, especially for the people it aims to protect. It essentially puts Jewish individuals no matter where they are and who they are on the hook for any and all actions of a *country*--purporting that they are one and the same. THIS IS NOT TRUE.

Jewish people need honest protections against rising antisemitism in the U.S.--rule that wouldn't allow blatant Nazi salute or gestures. Adopting a definition of anti-semitism that is far more focused on protecting the state of Israel, which has been committing genocide for the past 15 months as shown by the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, Amnesty International, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, Jewish Voice for Peace, and most importantly the thousands of civilians in Palestine that have been removed from their homes, starved, or murdered.

Critiquing a state is not critiquing a religion nor a people. You know this as many Jewish individuals have written to you opposing this bill as well. You've seen that these conversations are crucial for America's global standing and human rights here and abroad--it's been proven by the huge swaths of progress made in South Africa after global protest. Being able to talk about these issues on university grounds, in community spaces, and while taking care of one's health while masking (especially with the current rise of Kansas TB cases) is vital. It's American to use our free speech rights to seek justice.

It is deeply important to reject HB 2299 for the safety, care, and representation of Jewish, Palestinian, and all other types of Kansans.

Best,
Sam Rasheed
Constituent of Kansas

Personal Information

Full Name: JP Redmon

Email Address: johnpaulredmon@gmail.com

Phone Number (optional):

Bill Information

Bill Number: HB 2299

Position: Opponent

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

Written Testimony

This severely limits free speech. Anti-Zionism is not antisemitism. Please allow folks to use their voice. Activism is American. Human rights are worth fighting for.

Signature

Full Name (Typed): JP Redmon

Date: 2-9-2025

Opposition Testimony for HB 2299 – Written

Steven Ringel

ringelsteven@gmail.com

Bill Number: HB 2299

Position: Opponent

Date of Hearing: Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2025

Written Testimony

I am firmly opposed to HB 2299 as it is a dangerous attempt to weaponize the definition of antisemitism, silence dissent, and criminalize support for Palestine. The people of Kansas deserve legislators who 1) uphold a safe environment for people of all faiths and nationalities and 2) who uphold our constitutional right to freedom of speech. I oppose equating criticism of Israel with antisemitism, threatening universities and institutions with fines for events that are critical of Israel, censoring discussions of Palestine in classrooms, giving the Kansas Attorney General power to investigate and subpoena activists, and targeting masked protestors.

This is a McCarthy era tactic to silence, intimidate, and oppress. It is even more audacious that you threaten to do it under the banner of antisemitism – something that deserves our legitimate response to ensure the safety of our Jewish neighbors and friends. Additionally, it is abhorrent to be criminalizing masks as respiratory illnesses including COVID, influenza, and tuberculosis threaten the health and wellbeing of Kansans.

Leave Kansans out of your political theater. We possess the intelligence to assess situations as they stand and the courage to make decisions that are right. This bill is steeped in dangerous conflation that seek to confuse, divide, and harm. Take a break from parroting hateful rhetoric and do your jobs to ensure Kansans have access to a quality education, jobs with a livable wage, affordable food, and clean air and water.

Steven Ringel

Feb. 9, 2025

Testimony Submission - Kansas House Bill 2299

Personal Information

Full Name: Rachel M. Rolon

Organization (if applicable):

Email Address: rachel.rolon@gmail.com

Phone Number (optional):

Bill Information

Bill Number: HB 2299

Position: Opponent

Date of Hearing: February 7, 2025

Written Testimony

Thank you, chairwoman and committee. My name is Rachel Rolon, and I am a citizen of Kansas. I am opposed to this bill because I believe it can be broadly used to deny people's freedom of speech and peaceful assembly. In addition to people's ability to do this safely without spreading disease. Americans have always had the right to gather and oppose war and actions they did not believe in. As we saw last summer there were large amounts of people opposing the violence that was happening in Israel. I went to a few of the protests and encountered Jewish people who were passionate about stopping the violence against Palestinians and ending the war. People's opposition to violence does not equate hatred towards one group of people, it means they value life. With this value for life we saw these gatherings of people with folks wearing masks to make the space accessible to folks who are immunocompromised who wanted to have their voices heard, and to prevent the spread of any illness. I am concerned that including masks in this bill will incorrectly target people with disabilities and further disenfranchise this group from their right to freedom of speech and peaceful assembly. Additionally with the "Quad-demic" we are in at the moment it is imperative that we do everything we can to prevent another full blown pandemic and the excessive loss of life that can come with it. I am concerned this bill would restrict my freedoms as safely as a Kansan and that is why I am opposed to the bill.

Signature

Full Name (Typed): Rachel M. Rolon

Date: 2/7/2025

Testimony Submission - Kansas House Bill 2299

Personal Information

Full Name: Cassidy Schuster

Organization (if applicable): n/a

Email Address: Cassidyschuster13@gmail.com

Phone Number (optional):

Bill Information

Bill Number: HB 2299

Position: Opponent

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

Written Testimony

"As the largest anti-Zionist Jewish organization in the world, we unequivocally reject the conflation of antisemitism with anti zionism and reaffirm in the strongest terms that there is no place for antisemitism in our movements. We condemn the false accusations of antisemitism leveled against principled, anti-war protesters to discredit our movements" - [Jewish Voice For Peace, April 2024](#).

I am disappointed to learn of the introduction of HB 2299 which would conflate anti zionism to antisemitism, and in so doing, restrict Kansans' right to free speech. The [First Amendment](#) states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; **or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.**"

Introducing HB2299 would interfere with a Kansans' right to protest the state of Israel, and the ways in which their tax dollars contribute to a large-scale military offensive and occupation in Gaza and the West Bank. The [International Court of Justice](#) ruled in July of 2024 that the Israeli Occupation of Palestinian territories is unlawful and goes against International Law. HB2299 would prevent the right of the students and people of Kansas to support this ruling and criticize the State of Israel for its unlawful actions. Conflating Antisemitism with Anti Zionism would in itself be anti semitic, as Jerry Nadler the most senior Jewish member of the US House of Representatives pointed out in his [testimony](#) regarding HR894 - a similar resolution to HB2299. He stated "If [the authors] were at all familiar with Jewish history and culture, should know about Jewish anti-Zionism that was and is

expressly not antisemitic” and goes on to say that the measure “ignores certain Hasidic communities, progressive Jewish groups, and others that have held views that are at odds with modern Zionist conception” ([The Independent](#)). While I am fully in support of efforts to decrease antisemitism in the United States, I find it entirely unhelpful to take away the people’s ability to protest the unlawful occupation and increasingly likely genocide and ethnic cleansing that has occurred in Palestine over the [last seven decades](#). The death toll of the recent escalation of violence, lasting over fifteen months and with [periodic violence still occurring in spite of the ceasefire](#), is ever rising from the most recently estimated 61,709 deaths ([Al Jazeera](#)). At least 17,492 children were killed, and over 14,000 Palestinians are confirmed to still be missing, though experts from [the Lancet](#) estimate that the true death toll may be in the hundreds of thousands. There is no reason that the people of Kansas should not be able to criticize Israel’s treatment of Palestinians or call for accountability. There are countless stories of brutal violence committed by Israeli soldiers: ranging from 24 year old [Rachel Corrie’s death](#) in 2003 after she was run over by an Israeli bulldozer, [Shireen Abu Akleh](#), a Palestinian-American journalist killed while on assignment in the occupied West Bank, and the devastating story of [Hind Rajab](#): a six year old Palestinian girl who was killed trying to follow evacuation orders with her family. Al Jazeera’s Fault Lines and [Forensic Architecture’s](#) reports show that Israeli tanks were at close enough range that they could have seen that they were shooting at children, and yet over 330 bullets were shot at the car Hind and her four cousins were trapped in. Hind witnessed the deaths of her Uncle, Aunt, and cousins and sustained bullet wounds herself in the initial fire upon the car. She then spent over three hours speaking with members of the Palestinian Red Crescent Services (PRCS), who coordinated with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to secure a route for an ambulance to evacuate the child. However, when the ambulance and two paramedics were within sight of the car Hind was trapped in, they were blown to pieces by an Israeli tank. The PRCS team and Hind’s mother listened as the ambulance was destroyed and Hind uttered her last words before she bled out. There is absolutely no reason that the people of Kansas should not be able to protest such a gruesome and agonizing death of a child. There is no reason that the members of the IDF, or the State of Israel itself, should not face repercussions and take accountability for the unspeakable [war crimes](#) committed on the night of Hind’s death and the unlawful deaths of other children, medical workers, and journalists over the last 20+ years. In summary, this resolution interferes with Kansan’s right to free speech and is a targeted attempt to hinder criticism of the state of Israel. Similar to HR 894, it is unethical to “prohibit” antisemitism by conflating it with Anti Zionism, but do nothing to prohibit rising instances of Islamophobia in the United States. It is reprehensible to forbid any negative statements on Zionism in the United States, but allow statements such as US Rep Max Miller’s statement after introducing HR 894 which stated that he refuses to “call it the Palestinian flag because they’re not a state, they’re a territory that’s about to **probably get eviscerated and go away here shortly, as we’re going to turn that into a parking lot**” ([The Independent](#)). There are over 2 million people living in Gaza, many of whom have familial ties to those who have fled to other countries, including the United States. It is completely unacceptable to blatantly call for the removal and/or deaths of 2 million people, and tell the people in opposition to this that they are not allowed to speak out or protest, especially when their tax dollars are used to facilitate the “evisceration”. In November of 2024 the [Council on American-Islamic Relations \(CAIR\)](#) stated that in a report “based on survey responses from 720 students at 87 public and private colleges and universities during the 2023-2024 academic year, reveals that nearly 50% of Muslim students experienced harassment or discrimination on campus—a significant increase from 40% reported in CAIR-CA’s 2020 report. The findings also highlight how the October 7, 2023, attacks and the subsequent genocide in Gaza exacerbated Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian hate, and anti-Arab racism, leaving Muslim students feeling targeted

and unsupported.” HB2299 would leave Palestinian-American students on Kansas college campuses feeling even less supported. In addition, insinuations that campus protests, and other non-campus protests, are violent and full of antisemitism are illegitimate and misleading. In May of 2024 the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) found that “between 7 October and 3 May, the overwhelming majority of student demonstrations — 97% — have remained peaceful” ([ACLED](#)). Protests are often guided and well attended by Jewish individuals, often associated with Jewish Voice for Peace, an organization which has been advocating against the dangerous conflation of Anti Zionism with antisemitism since at least 2021 when they published a document entitled “Dismantle Antisemitism, Not Palestinian Rights: Oppose the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism.” This document states that “The controversial International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) definition of antisemitism does not make Jewish people safer, but it does threaten Palestinian rights advocates, and free speech. By design, the IHRA definition’s focus on branding criticism of Israel as antisemitic makes it a tool to silence Palestinians and shield the Israeli government from accountability” (“[Dismantle Antisemitism, Not Palestinian Rights: Oppose the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism](#).”) HB2299 would restrict Kansans’ from utilizing their First Amendment Right to speak out against injustice and stand up for the vulnerable and must not be allowed to pass.

Signature

Full Name (Typed): Cassidy Schuster

Date: 2/10/25

Testimony Submission - Kansas House Bill 2299

Personal Information

Full Name: Chris Taylor

Organization (if applicable):

Email Address: christaylor@midco.net

Phone Number (optional):

Bill Information

Bill Number: HB 2299

Position: Opponent

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

Written Testimony

Kansas House Bill 2299 criminalizes any criticism of Israel by weaponizing the IHRA definition of antisemitism in an attempt to silence Pro-Palestine activism in public institutions. This bill isn't about fighting real antisemitism—it's about criminalizing dissent and suppressing Palestinian voices.

Signature

Full Name (Typed): Chris Taylor

Date: February 9, 2025

From: [Sophia Terian](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: HB 2299 - Opponent - Written-Only Testimony
Date: Monday, February 10, 2025 1:29:00 AM

Sophie Terian
University of Kansas PhD Student
1702 Ohio St, Apt 5
Lawrence, KS, 66044
sjterian@gmail.com
2/10/2025

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

Sarah Vernier
sarahvernier01@gmail.com

HB 2299
Opponent
February 11, 2025

I appreciate this opportunity to share my opposition to this bill. My name is Sarah Vernier and I am someone who wears masks on a daily basis for personal health and safety.

I am in particular quite concerned by the language in this bill about antisemitism including the wearing of masks to conceal identity with the intent to harass or discriminate against Jewish students, faculty, or employees on school property.

This bill defines anti-semitism using the IHRA's working definition of anti-semitism; this definition has been controversial and rejected by many Jewish groups themselves. In 2018, over 40 Jewish groups worldwide condemned the IHRA definition as "worded in such a way as to be easily adopted or considered by western governments to intentionally equate legitimate criticisms of Israel and advocacy for Palestinian rights with antisemitism, as a means to suppress the former". To restate, HB 2299 allows for broad interpretation of antisemitism and retaliation under the law. We must be able to distinguish between nuanced criticism (which no person or government is immune to based on any characteristic) and the despicable act of antisemitism.

Broad language like this bill contains would expose anyone who was trying to protect their health and safety to charges of antisemitism. And while many would argue that those who weren't breaking the law wouldn't be harmed, that's simply not how our legal system works de facto. In many, many cases, people are harmed by laws that should never have applied to them.

It also serves to chill Americans' first amendment protected right to assemble by limiting the right to assembly. This is deeply concerning to me. I oppose this bill in its current form.

Sarah Vernier
2/7/2025

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Bill Information

Bill Number: HB 2299

Position: Opponent

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

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

From: [Kathleen Williams](#)
To: [House Education](#)
Subject: HB2299
Date: Sunday, February 9, 2025 6:20:41 PM

Greetings legislators,

Regarding HB 2299, this bill seems redundant. Does the state not already protect all its citizens from religious discrimination in schools? Has there been some kind of glaring oversight where up until now Jewish students and staff have been excluded from the state's protection of religious freedom?

Passing this bill would seem to imply that the State of Kansas has up until now left Jewish citizens out of state protections. Alternately, it implies that Jewish citizens be afforded extra protections and special treatment.

Moreover, I am greatly concerned by the inclusion in this bill that targets people wearing masks.

Students and staff have legitimate health and safety reasons to wear masks. This bill seems to set a precedent that anyone wearing a mask might be accused of antisemitism. That is preposterous.

I urge you to vote down this redundant bill that gives special treatment to some while targeting others.

Kat Williams, Ph.D.
Artisan & Scholar
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