

To the Education Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to enter testimony as regards HB 2299. I am a Kansas resident and long-time member of Citizens for Justice in the Middle East, a local citizens group in the Kansas City area that for 20 years has advocated for a fair and even-handed U.S. foreign policy as regards Israel- Palestine. Since 2019, I have co-hosted a weekly radio program in Kansas City called Understanding Israel Palestine. It features interviews with scholars, policy experts, journalists and humanitarian officials discussing the struggle over land and rights.

I have many concerns about HB 2299, which uses the controversial IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, a definition that the scholar who drafted it, Kenneth Stern, says is being applied in ways that were not intended. Instead, Stern says, it is being used as vehicle to stifle criticism of Israel and to chill free speech. The ACLU and many other groups, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Presbyterian Church USA, the American Friends Service Committee, etc. agree.

I understand you have the statement from the ACLU warning of the bill's threat to the First Amendment. I am copying a link to the letter that Human Rights Watch and 120 other groups sent to the U.N. Secretary-General expressing concern about a proposal before the United Nations to adopt the IHRA definition. Below that is a link to a statement by 128 Holocaust, genocide-studies and Jewish-history scholars expressing their own opposition to the U.N.'s adoption of the IHRA. They call it a "politicized definition" and warn that adoption of the IHRA Working Definition of Anti-Semitism "would transform any factual discussion about Israeli violations and accountability into a fraught debate about alleged antisemitism. T

Proponents of the bill have said they support HB 2299 as a way to combat an explosion of anti-Semitism in the United States. How much anti-Semitism is there? The Anti-Defamation League has never revealed how it compiles its statistics and many question its reliability. An article in *The Guardian* newspaper Jan. 5, 2024 reveals that ADL reports of a rise in anti-Semitism can in part be traced to a different methodology the ADL is now using based on the IHRA Working Definition of anti-Semitism and that members of the ADL's own staff object to how ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt has chosen to conflate anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism. An article in *The Jewish Telegraph* in June reports on Wikipedia editors adding the ADL to a list of banned or partially banned sources after finding the ADL unreliable on the topic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on the topic of anti-Semitism. The JTA article notes that Greenblatt has called student protesters Iranian proxies, compared the keffiyeh head scarf to the swastika and equated anti-Zionism with white supremacy. I have copied the link to that article below as well as Wikipedia's listing of anti-Semitic incidents in the United States dating back to 1862. I think committee members will find that list instructive and even surprising..

Indisputably, clear examples of anti-Semitism exist. There are also perceptions of anti-Semitism that can be debated and fear-mongering that exaggerates or misrepresents incidents as anti-Semitic for political purposes. All three categories have risen in the last 16 months. A professor of law at Harvard University and the author *To Be a Jew Today: A New Guide to God, Israel and the Jewish People*, Noah Feldman said in a talk at Harvard on the one-year anniversary of Oct. 7, "The long process by which American Jewish identity came to be primarily bound up in Israel meant that for Jews to hear the view expressed that Israel's very existence is morally problematic, or may be wrongful, is sincerely experienced as anti-Semitic."

Like racism, Islamophobia and other forms of bigotry, anti-Semitism is reprehensible. But singling out one group of people for special protection strikes me as counter-productive, especially when the aim of legislation seems less the promotion of tolerance than the suppression of speech. Like other Americans, U.S. Jews have diverse views about Israel's decades-long occupation of Palestinian land and its war in Gaza. These views deserve to be heard. It is the absence of informed discourse and debate in this country that has led to the tragedy that exists in the Holy Land today.

Sincerely,
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<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/04/human-rights-and-other-civil-society-groups-urge-united-nations-respect-human>

<https://media.euobserver.com/9e86df02ddf67c6046d190b65e4380df.pdf>

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2024/jan/05/adl-pro-israel-advocacy-zionism-antisemitism>

<https://www.jta.org/2024/06/18/united-states/adl-faces-wikipedia-ban-over-reliability-concerns-on-israel-antisemitism>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_antisemitic_incidents_in_the_United_States