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LD 1351

Thank you Senator Carney and Representative Kuhn and members of the Judiciary Committee.

I urge you NOT to pass LD 1351 - An Act to Require Antisemitism to Be Considered as Motivation When Determining a Violation of a Criminal or Civil Law.

This may seem surprising, coming from an American Jew born in the aftermath of the Holocaust, raised with hope for the new State of Israel, and taught to be constantly vigilant of anti-semitism, even in prosperous America, the land of the free. I don't take anti-semitism lightly and nobody should. It is one of the oldest and most destructive hatreds in the world and it is very much alive today. I and my family have experienced it personally right here in our small town in Maine.

However, I believe strongly that we are in a moment when "protecting Jews from anti-semitism" is being used perniciously as a smokescreen to cause harm to institutions and to individuals.

To address the attack on institutions. Funding for America's greatest universities is being threatened, with the excuse that they supposedly have not done enough to protect Jewish students from anti-semitism on campus. Though I'm sure that there were Jewish students who felt threatened by anti-semitism during last year's campus protests against the war in Gaza, there were also many Jewish students who supported and actively participated in these protests. At issue is whether criticism of the State of Israel, in this case protest against the war waged in Gaza, is by definition anti-semitism. I insist it is not. Making Judaism and Israel the same is a knot that must be untied.

It is hard not to support the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, whose "working definition of antisemitism" would be adopted in this bill. Their website on this provides a brief, 39-word definition that seems OK to me. But the website goes on to say: "To guide IHRA in its work, the following examples may serve as illustrations..." Among the examples is "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor." Prominent in the protests for Palestinian rights is the argument that Israel has become an apartheid state. This argument is not illegitimate. But I fear that adopting the IHRA definition of anti-semitism might be construed to label protest against Israeli treatment of Palestinians as anti-semitic.

To address the attack on individuals. Individuals who have a legal right to study and work in the United States are literally being snatched off the streets and imprisoned because they have used their freedom of speech to protest the war in Gaza. Here again "protecting Jews from anti-semitism" is, I fear, a smokescreen — to facilitate the rapid removal of immigrants without due process.

I ask you consider — why is this bill being proposed at this moment in time? And I say, not to protect Jews from anti-semitism.

As a Jew, I cherish universities and education and am horrified at how they are being attacked by the executive branch of our government.

As a Jew, I cherish the rights that the United States affords to its residents and know that my family immigrated to this country because of the opportunities that a country with such strong freedoms affords.

As a Jew, I ask you: do not weaken the constitutional rights of free speech of individuals and universities in my name.

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