

Allyson Hawkins
Albion
LD 1351

I am writing today to share why I oppose LD 1351 - An Act to Require Antisemitism to Be Considered as Motivation When Determining a Violation of a Criminal or Civil Law.

The IHRA definition of antisemitism being utilized in this case conflates criticism of Israel and Zionism with antisemitism. This conflation would greatly infringe on free speech and our collective ability to help hold governments, like Israel, accountable.

The weaponization of antisemitism intensified discrimination and exclusion of vulnerable communities in the U.S. including Jews. I believe we need to listen to the increasingly prevalent calls from Jews saying conflating the freedom to criticize Israel and Zionism does not make them safer; rather, it erodes the fundamental right to free speech for all people.

The Trump administration and those who support supremacist ideologies are actively trying to suppress free speech and the peaceful right to protest. This attack on free speech should not come to Maine.

I've spent many years considering how, through the lens of freedom of speech, the ability to critique and hold institutions accountable is necessary to make them better. I believe this remains the case, and that speech, however critical, critiquing Israel or Zionism is not antisemitic.

The IHRA outlines contemporary examples of antisemitism and 7 of 11 of the examples outlined involve criticism of the state of Israel, not of the Jewish people. Defining antisemitism so broadly and vaguely will have chilling effects on free speech, scholarship, and public dialogue around international affairs and current events.

Adoption of this definition by governments and institutions has been framed as a way to combat antisemitism. However, in practice, the IHRA definition has often been used to wrongly label criticism of Israel - a state - as antisemitic. Contrary to combating genuine antisemitism, it has the effect of suppressing non-violent protest, activism, and speech that is critical of Israel and/or Zionism, not the Jewish people. This definition has historically been used to target professors, students, grassroots organizations, human rights groups, and even members of the US congress, who either document or criticize Israeli policies or human rights violations.

For these reasons, and because I truly don't believe this blunt instrument, which can label nearly anyone as an antisemite, makes any of us, Jews and/or those with views critical of Israel, any safer, I ask you to consider withholding your support from this act. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Allyson Hawkins
Albion, ME