

2025-4-7_LD 1351 Testimony to Maine Legislature Judiciary Committee
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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm here as both a concerned Mainer and a human rights professional to express my strong opposition to LD 1351, which proposes adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. While I believe deeply in the importance of confronting and combating antisemitism in all its forms, this bill—by endorsing a definition that conflates antisemitism with criticism of the state of Israel—poses a direct threat to free speech, academic freedom, and the broader fight for justice, both in the U.S. and internationally.

The IHRA definition has been widely criticized for its vagueness and potential misuse. Seven of the eleven examples cited in the IHRA definition directly link criticism of Israel to antisemitism. This is a dangerous and misleading conflation. The definition has already been used, in the U.S. and globally, to target students, professors, human rights organizations, and even members of Congress who speak out against Israeli policies or advocate for Palestinian rights. It suppresses nonviolent protest, activism, and academic inquiry—all of which are essential components of a healthy democracy. Suppressing such speech does not make us safer; it makes us less democratic.

This is not just a hypothetical concern. In 2023, 60 civil and human rights organizations—including Human Rights Watch, the ACLU, B'Tselem, and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights—urged the United Nations not to adopt the IHRA definition. Even Ken Stern, the lead drafter of the definition, has warned against its misuse as a “blunt instrument to label anyone an antisemite.” This is a clear sign that the definition, while well-intended, has become a tool for silencing legitimate dissent.

Furthermore, the weaponization of antisemitism in this way has the opposite of its intended effect. It does not protect Jewish communities—it endangers them by aligning Jewish safety with state violence and silencing those, including many Jews, who advocate for Palestinian rights. The bill, in its current form, risks marginalizing Jewish voices who are critical of Israel, while also silencing broader coalitions fighting for human rights and dignity. This plays into the hands of white supremacist movements and far-right ideologues—many of whom are the true sources of rising antisemitic violence and rhetoric.

I respectfully urge this committee to reject LD 1351 as written and instead adopt the **Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism** as a more precise and rights-affirming alternative which more clearly distinguishes between antisemitism and legitimate criticism of a state. The JDA is endorsed by hundreds of scholars and offers a robust framework for identifying and fighting antisemitism without infringing on protected speech or undermining the work of human rights advocates, including many within the Jewish community. Let's ensure that Maine protects both the safety of our Jewish communities and the essential freedoms that allow all of us to speak out against injustice. Thank you for your time, your commitment to justice, and your consideration of my testimony.

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Submission of amended testimony (original submitted on 4/6/2025).