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To the Judiciary Committee:

I am writing as a Jewish resident of Maine to forcefully oppose this bill.

First, I oppose this bill because it would put Jews like myself at risk. When antisemitism is politicized in this way, it allows bad actors to villainize Jews and blame us for political problems. Although this may not be the intention of this bill, history shows that weaponizing antisemitism for politics just puts Jews in more danger, rather than protecting us like this bill purports to do.

Second, I oppose this bill because it is simply false to call criticism of Israel antisemitic. I oppose the genocide that the Israeli military is currently perpetuating, in which children are being slaughtered every day and families are starved by Israeli blockades. I am Jewish. Am I antisemitic? No - instead, I support the human rights of everyone, including Arab Palestinians. It is a fundamental Jewish belief to uplift humanity in all its forms, and so opposing Israel's genocide of Palestinians is in line with my Judaism, not antisemitic.

Proponents of the IHRA's definition of antisemitism say Israel equals Jews and Jews equal Israel. This makes no sense: less than half of the world's Jews live in Israel, and Israel is only around 75% Jewish. So we cannot equate a government with all the people of a religion in the world. Further, many Jews within Israel oppose the genocide and the Netanyahu regime that is perpetrating it. Are they antisemitic? No - they are critical of a government. I would even consider criticism and protest of a government in order to make a country live up to its highest ideals patriotic, just like the Americans who have protested their government throughout history when it has failed to live up to its highest ideals. These Americans emerge in time to be seen as American heroes who stood up for what is right when it was unpopular, from Eleanor Roosevelt to Martin Luther King. Calling criticism of a government a form of hatred of a religion not only makes no sense, but it also undermines the brave work of those who stand up to criticize their governments when they are unjust - including American and Israeli Jews today who are critical of the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Last, I oppose this bill because redefining antisemitism under the IHRA definition, and then considering speech under that definition when determining a violation of civil or criminal law, would be a huge infringement of free speech. Actors at the national level are trying to weaponize rhetoric about antisemitism in order to censor legitimate free speech that is criticizing the military actions of a foreign country, Israel. We cannot let these national politics come to Maine.

Sincerely,

Lucy Britt, Lewiston