

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Committee,

I write because I am strongly opposed to L.D. 1351 and urge you to vote “ought not to pass” on this bill.

I am a 12-year resident of Portland, Maine, after having lived for over 27 years in Central Maine. I am a Jew, as are my husband and two adult children. My mother-in-law—who is still alive at the age of almost 100—had to flee Nazi Germany at the age of 13 to escape to safety first in England and ultimately in the U.S. due to the Nazis’ campaign to eradicate Jews in Germany and ultimately throughout all Nazi-occupied territories. All of my husband’s relatives on his mother’s side were killed by the Nazis except for his mother, her sister, and their mother. I have traveled to Germany to visit the areas where they lived and were buried. And I have traveled in Israel. I feel the weight and horror of true antisemitism in my bones, and I do all I can to ensure that no Jew experiences this type of discrimination.

Historically, antisemitism is discrimination based on one’s ethnicity (sometimes thought of as race) or religion. The definition of antisemitism L.D. 1351 seeks to enshrine in Maine law conflates criticism of Israel and Zionism with true antisemitism. Israel is a country. Zionism was originally a movement for the establishment of a Jewish nation in what is now Israel, and it is now a movement for the protection of Israel. Adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism would infringe on free speech and individual’s collective ability to work on holding governments, like that of Israel, accountable.

The movement to adopt the IHRA definition results in the weaponization of antisemitism (using it as a sword rather than a shield), and it intensifies discrimination against and exclusion of vulnerable communities in the U.S., including but not limited to Jews. I have been horrified by the efforts of Republican supporters of now-President Trump and more recently by the Trump administration—under the guise of eradicating antisemitism—to suppress free speech and the peaceful right to protest. For example, these efforts have suppressed speech and protest against Israeli settler (and Israeli Defence Force) violence in the West Bank and Gaza. This type of suppression of political speech and action has no place in Maine.

I apologize for not submitting this testimony earlier, but I only learned of this bill and the public hearing about one hour ago.

Again, I urge you to vote “ought not to pass” on this bill. Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta de Araujo

Portland, Maine

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LD 1351

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