

Joe Pearl
Knox
LD 1351

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhh, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee of the Judiciary, my name is Joe Pearl, I live in Knox, and I urge you to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 1351.

I am a Jewish carpenter and farmer who has spent most of my life in rural, blue-collar, New England communities. I have been perennially the only Jew in my class and the only Jew at my place of work. I know well that there is a lot of ignorance out there about Judaism, and that anti-semitic stereotypes are alive and well. Anti-semitism is a serious issue, and there is no question that it is on the rise. But the IHRA definition of anti-semitism that this bill proposes to adopt is deeply flawed and wholly incapable of meeting this challenging moment.

Rather than focus on the real-life prejudice, bigotry, and violence that Jews experience for being perceived as different, the IHRA definition focuses largely on what people can and cannot say about Israel. Israel is a modern nation-state, it is NOT shorthand for the Jewish people. As a political entity, the state of Israel must be held to the same human rights standards as any other country. When the state and its military commits human rights abuses and atrocities, Jews like myself around the world loudly and proudly stand up against its actions. This definition limits what we can say before our political speech, even as Jews, is labeled “anti-semitic.” I have no intention of breaking any laws, but the political speech of someone who breaks a law should be held to the same standard as my political speech.

Everyone has heard of “Project 2025,” which was written by the conservative group the Heritage Foundation, and is being implemented by the current administration. There is a lesser-known proposal, also written by the Heritage Foundation, called “Project Esther,” which seeks to criminalize all speech in support of the Palestinian people and their dreams of self-determination. With the arrests, deportations, and the literal disappearance of student and faculty activists who had broken no laws, but had publicly spoken out against the actions of the state of Israel, it is abundantly clear that the current administration is following the Project Esther playbook. This should scare us all, because Project Esther has been widely reported as a tool to launch broader attacks on free speech and activism, and I strongly encourage you to do more research about Project Esther for your working session.

I also encourage you to research the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (<https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>), which was created as a response to the IHRA definition.

Please vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 1351. Thank you.

Joe Pearl