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Portland  
LD 1383

#### Written Testimony Against LD 1383

To: Maine Legislature — State and Local Government Committee

Date: January 21 2026, 11:00AM

Re: Opposition to LD 1383 — “An Act to Require State Divestment from Perpetrators of International Human Rights Violations”

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I oppose LD 1383 because it risks repeating harms already observed in Maine, harming community cohesion, and entangling Maine’s fiscal policy in politically charged international disputes.

#### Lessons from Portland’s Divestment Vote

In September 2024, the Portland City Council unanimously passed a resolution urging divestment from companies doing business with Israel. While framed as a response to the conflict in Gaza, the measure quickly became controversial.

Portland’s mayor, Mark Dion, later publicly acknowledged that his vote was a mistake, describing it as “pretentious,” “a serious mistake in judgment,” and a “betrayal of the trust that Jewish people should expect from the mayor’s office.” He apologized to the Jewish community for the harm caused. Council members noted that the resolution was largely symbolic and that the city had no meaningful financial stake in the companies targeted.

The resolution deeply alienated many in Portland’s Jewish community, who felt blindsided by the city government’s decision and that the measure unfairly singled out Israel — the world’s only Jewish state — in a way that many perceived as discriminatory. Jewish leaders described the vote as “a deeply inappropriate use of the City Council’s time and resources” and stated it “alienates a significant portion of Portland’s Jewish residents.”

Portland’s vote also sparked national backlash, including a full-page ad by more than 100 rabbis warning that the divestment action encouraged antisemitism and urging caution in engaging with Portland businesses due to the vote’s impact on Jewish safety and inclusion. Locally, residents reported an increase in antisemitic graffiti, and Jewish children experienced heightened bullying after the vote — even though the resolution had no practical effect on Maine’s finances.

The Legislature should be cautious about policies that could increase intolerance or make any Mainers feel unsafe — especially when the law would have minimal financial impact.

Portland’s experience demonstrates how well-intentioned symbolic divestment measures can have real social costs without delivering real policy change. LD 1383 risks repeating this pattern on a statewide scale — imposing politically motivated investment criteria likely to provide symbolic but not substantive impact, while alienating and harming some Maine communities.

#### Lessons from Other States

While no state has passed a law identical to LD 1383, experiences with politically driven investment mandates — such as laws in Oklahoma, Indiana, Kansas, and Texas that restricted how public pension funds could invest based on political or social criteria — highlight the risks of tying public funds to ideological goals. These states faced legal challenges, potential conflicts with fiduciary duty, administrative complexity, and warnings of reduced investment returns, leading in many cases to amendments, delays, or costly compliance efforts. The pattern demonstrates that embedding politically defined investment requirements can create financial, legal, and operational burdens, even when well-intentioned, and suggests that LD 1383 could expose Maine to similar challenges.

## Rising Antisemitism and Political Context

Antisemitic incidents in the U.S., New England, and Maine have risen sharply over the past decade, reaching record levels of assault, harassment, and vandalism in 2024, according to the Anti-Defamation League. This increase has been fueled in part by heightened political tensions over international conflicts. Jewish community members have expressed concern that politically charged investment policies, even when well-intentioned, can inadvertently contribute to an environment where antisemitism grows, or make Jewish residents feel unsafe or marginalized.

Recent reports in Maine, including antisemitic graffiti near Portland synagogues and harassment of Jewish students in local schools, illustrate that politically charged actions can exacerbate local tensions. In February 2024, downtown Camden — where I grew up — was the site of an antisemitic incident in which swastikas and other Holocaust-referencing graphics were placed on a building in broad daylight. Local leaders condemned the act, emphasizing that hatred has no place in Maine, yet the event illustrates how politically charged climates can embolden antisemitic expression and make Jewish residents feel unsafe or marginalized.

As Maine State Representative Vicki Doudera, one of the sponsors of LD 1383, said upon learning of the images, “Maine is experiencing an uptick in acts of antisemitism, with some of those incidents hitting close to home... Camden is a welcoming town, a place that harbors love and hope — not hatred. I invite everyone to join me in standing with my Jewish American friends and neighbors against antisemitism and antisemitic acts.” (PenBayPilot.com)

Given this context, I urge the Legislature to stand with the Jewish community of Maine by rejecting LD 1383 sending a clear message that Maine will not allow political policy to create unsafe environments for any residents. Passing this law risks escalating political tensions, alienating vulnerable residents, and creating an environment where antisemitism can grow — even unintentionally.

By voting “ought not to pass,” you can demonstrate that Maine prioritizes safety, inclusion, and community cohesion while still supporting human rights and ethical investment through other means.

## Conclusion

While supporting human rights and ethical investment is a worthy aspiration, LD 1383 is not the right mechanism to achieve it. The experience in Portland shows that divestment policies tied to geopolitical issues can:

- fail to achieve substantive change,
- create unnecessary division, and
- cause harm to vulnerable community members.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote “ought not to pass” on LD 1383 and instead pursue approaches that focus on fiscal responsibility and unity without embedding political judgments into pension investment mandates.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Jessica  
Portland, Maine