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Testimony of Rep. Sam Zager neither for nor against
LD 1351, An Act to Require Antisemitism to Be Considered as Motivation
When Determining a Violation of a Criminal or Civil Law
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, esteemed Judiciary Committee members, thank you for hearing this bill. I am here today to testify neither for nor against, **LD 1351, An Act to Require Antisemitism to Be Considered as Motivation When Determining a Violation of a Criminal or Civil Law.**

I appreciate Representative Griffin calling attention to the grave issue of antisemitism. She and I are in our fifth year serving together on the Health and Human Services Committee, and I really value that.

This bill cites an international definition of “antisemitism” that the United States, Israel and many of our closest allies and partners were party to in 2016. Nevertheless, I have concerns about this bill moving forward because of process and context.

Several community members are testifying. You are very gracious, patient and thoughtful as a committee, so I will just add a few other personal thoughts.

I am Jewish and began engaging in community actions and efforts regarding antisemitism in the mid-1980s in elementary school when synagogues, including my own, were desecrated with swastikas and hate speech in central New Jersey. My brother and I were bullied and taunted for being Jewish. Why did people hate us?

As I tried to answer this question in middle school and then high school, I started to understand that we had not done anything to deserve scorn. For many centuries, Jews have been unjustly targeted, assaulted and murdered. I naturally learned a lot about the Holocaust. I also learned about the KKK and other hate groups in this country; subtle and insidious manifestations of antisemitism; the countless Eastern European pogroms of the late 1800s and early 1900s, from which my own family fled to this country; the Spanish Inquisition starting in the 1490s; the medieval slaughters of Jews who were wrongly blamed for things ranging from the Great Plague to any individual local, unsolved mystery. Jews were targeted merely for being non-Christian, as

in the Third Crusade in 1320 when crusaders set a building on fire in Verdun-sur-Garonne, France, in which five hundred Jews were attempting to hide from persecution. Other antisemitic mass-killing occurred in England at Clifford's Tower in York, England in 1190. Going further back, the ancient Romans prohibited Jewish teaching or the ordination of rabbis. Those who continued to express their Jewish faith were flayed and skinned alive, then executed. Antisemitism is an extremely old form of hate with many permutations. The establishment of the modern State of Israel has brought new versions of antisemitism as well, which others have shared.

All this is to say that antisemitism and its very definition is part of a broader community conversation, which must include the communities most impacted by the form of hate. I don't see that this occurred in the preparation of this bill.

Thank you for your attention and service.