

Testimony for LD1383; January 21, 2026

Submitted by Joan Schwartz, PhD; Newcastle ME

I'd like to thank the Chair and the Committee for their interest in the bill being discussed today. Like others who have taken time out of their busy schedules to come before you today, I am requesting you support LD1383 to divest from companies that profit from human rights abuses, unlawful detentions, oppression and genocide.

The Maine State Employees Retirement fund currently supplies weapons and surveillance that makes the state complicit in human rights abuses here, and abroad ~ including Gaza and the West Bank. I recently received the following message from a friend of mine in the West Bank. He speaks of the hope he finds in the work being done here in Maine to end the violence and oppression Palestinians experience under US support for the Israeli occupation.

"I am writing to you with a very heavy heart to tell you about a harrowing experience my family and I endured last night. It is a nightmare that I will never forget.

At 2:00 in the morning, Israeli soldiers stormed our home to arrest my 12 years old son, Ahmad. He was shaking with fear, and seeing my child like that broke my heart. When Jamilah began to cry, a masked soldier placed his weapon against her head and threatened to shoot her if she spoke another word. Because I speak Hebrew fluently, I was able to talk calmly to the commander, a man named Uri, who eventually apologized and ordered his soldiers out of our house.

I begged him not to arrest Ahmad, who is just a child, but he said he was following orders. Then, at least I asked him to allow me to accompany Ahmad, because he will die of fear as he being arrested or interrogated by the soldiers. He did allow me to go with him so Ahmad wouldn't be alone. As we were leaving, a female soldier violently grabbed my sweater and forced us into the military vehicle, refusing to let me even put on shoes or a jacket in the freezing night air.

We were taken to a Palestinian family home that had been turned into a military base. There, I saw my own cousins and neighbors who had been severely beaten. Ahmad and I were blindfolded and made to sit on the freezing ground. I held Ahmad on my lap to protect him from the cold.

The most bitter irony came when an intelligence officer I know, Abu Jamil, questioned me. He didn't ask a single thing about Ahmad. Instead, he asked how I survived without tourism money and he suggested I take my family and leave Palestine for Europe or Canada. When we were finally released at 5:00 a.m. we had to walk home in the dark. We were almost shot by another patrol until an elderly Palestinian man ushered us into his home for safety. When we finally reached our house, our whole clan was there, and Jamilah cried with joy to see us safe.

I tell you this because it shows that this violence is systematic, it is designed to deprive us of our humanity. But I am sure that we will never lose our spirit.

In the middle of this darkness, Jamilah and I are very lucky because we find hope in you....

"Your voice in Maine, speaking for our rights, is what gives us the most strength.

Ahmed and the children are brave, but the fear stays with them. I will try to send a photo of us all soon so you can see the faces of the friends you are fighting for.

With love and deep respect,

Amer Al-Badan and Jamilah