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Portland, Maine

Testimony in opposition to LD 1383

Thank you for hearing my testimony today. I oppose this bill for many reasons, and I concur with the legal and fiscal arguments that more qualified people have put forth. However, the reason I'd like to talk about today is based on painful personal experience, and one that I'd like to spare others, if I can.

The basis of LD 1383 is that there are state (and non-state) actors that are so heinous that they should not be supported in any way by any official Maine action, however remote - that they should be publicly identified and expressly boycotted.

In 2024, the city of Portland decided that the State of Israel deserved this treatment and unanimously passed its Israel divestment bill. Unsurprisingly, the bill had no impact at all on the GDP of Israel. Instead it harmed Jewish Mainers like my family. Because of our ties to Israel, we perhaps felt it more than others, with our children bullied and harassed by kids experiencing the odd joy of being able to bully someone and feel self-righteous about it.

Graffiti, brutal anti-semetic "jokes", "River to the Sea! and Free Palestine" jibes all became a regular backdrop of my oldest daughter's high school experience. When I was growing up, this treatment would have excited indignation from bystanders and support from her peers. In this atmosphere, teachers and kids alike were too afraid or too biased to speak out. Other Jewish kids were afraid to speak up, lest they be targeted. She fought it out by herself, largely alone.

Our experience was, sadly, not unique. No Jewish Portlander in my town has escaped the anti-semetic blowback unleashed by that bill. To this day, all three Portland synagogues need to have armed guards protecting services. The Jewish Community Association must check ID at the door for certain activities and functions. And the hate mail, the nazi tropes, and anonymous trolling is a regular feature of life in administration of a Jewish organization in a way that hasn't been seen in decades..

The sponsors of the Portland legislation probably didn't intend for their bill to do more than impact funding for Israel. Unfortunately, official censure of a country has a terrible way of becoming a license to hate its people. Equally unfortunately: at all times, in all societies, there are those who are looking for a reason to hate - and feel great about it.

I am opposed to LD 1383 because I don't want to see any other Mainer go through the same experience because of their association with a country that the state legislature has decided needs to be punished. **The State of Maine shouldn't be in the business of deciding who it is ok to hate.** Somali Mainers shouldn't feel they have to hide their heritage, Chinese immigrants should feel safe celebrating Chinese New Year, Muslim Mainers shouldn't have to be afraid to go to a mosque, Pakistani and Indian immigrant children should be able to play together as friends. All Mainers, regardless of where they were born or what they believe, or what they look like, shouldn't be denied acceptance in this beautiful place we all share.