

Good morning,

My name is Sass Borodkin. I'm here today as a Jewish person to ask you not to pass LD1351. I don't want you to pass it because I don't want the concept of antisemitism to continue to be used to justify silencing people who are speaking out against the atrocities and war crimes happening in Gaza. I don't want to be used for political maneuvering, or to justify violence. Did you know Israel just burned a journalist alive last night? They dropped a bomb on his tent, even though it was a known space for members of the press to be residing. People need to be able to speak up for the 50,000+ people that have been slaughtered in Palestine just since 2023 using US artillery, and for the people who are being abducted off the streets by ICE based on their political speech and then disappeared from their families by thousands of miles in some cases.

This bill feels to me like it could lead to strategies for silencing activists that are trying to stop children from getting killed, and I want to beg you not to pass it. Over a thousand people have been killed just since the ceasefire was lifted last month. Tons of those people are children because about 50% of Gaza's population are children.

I'm Jewish. I am not antisemitic because I don't support the nation state of Israel, or their policies. Israel is a place, not a people and the definition of antisemitism this bill points towards conflates the two in ways that could make it easier to stop people like me from speaking out against a genocide that is clear in its path. If you look at the definition the bill points toward it starts out by saying that criticism of Israel cannot be regarded as antisemitic but then it lists out explicit interpretations for antisemitism including these two points:

"Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor."

and

"Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis."

If these do not directly conflate the antisemitism with the state of Israel and its policies, I'm not really sure what does.

60 humanitarian and civil rights organizations including Human Rights Watch (HRW), American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Israeli rights group B'Tselem, and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), appealed to the UN to not use the IHRA definition in its action plan against antisemitism and subsequent activities. There is a reason for that. I now join them in asking you not to adopt it either.

Thanks for listening.

Sass Borodkin
Skowhegan, ME