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Hello and thank you, Chair and Committee Members. My name is Eli Edgecomb and I'm a constituent from the town of Scarborough.

I stand today in opposition to this legislation. I am a progressive concerned with discrimination of all kinds. I find antisemitism repugnant and intolerable.

I am also a student of history. I've read 1984. I understand the way language in a bill is manipulated to make it sound like it something only a monster would argue against. And how often the goal and end use is utterly different. This is such a bill. Like the Patriot Act, it sounds egalitarian and patriotic. But its purpose is to limit the rights and exert undue control over protected speech and behavior. In this case, the right to assemble and criticize our government.

I served three terms as a delegate to the Democratic State Committee. So I know a little about how politics works, for good and for evil. I see what's happening in our land. The erosion of the Bill of Rights has been happening for decades, but is now in a wild acceleration. I'm seeing institutions of higher learning, traditionally a place for student protest, shutting down free speech. I'm seeing people be kidnapped by people in plain clothes who refuse to identify themselves and behave like secret police picking up people who have every right to criticize the government. And I'm seeing our government ignore court orders to return those people. And I'm seeing AIPAC use their war chest to bully lawmakers into voting for laws that stand in direct violation of the First Amendment.

We all saw the astonishing levels of dissent this weekend. We know there is a fundamental difference between a love of country and approval of any one administration's policies. And we understand, or at least we ought to understand, as Americans, as Mainers, that we have a fundamental right in a representative democracy to stand up and say no, not in my name. It's in the First Amendment. And they put that amendment first for a reason. Because a government that can legislate away your right to public dissent can do anything. And that is tyranny.

The idea that, in the United States of America, you can't criticize the actions of government, that you can't criticize our tax dollars being used to purposely target children and journalists, that you can't stand against literally genocide, is unthinkable. Creating this law gives a would be dictator a means to shut down dissent. And it won't stop at criticism of the Israeli government or our financial support of their violence. It is the path to tyranny. And it is un-American.

I know that there is a great deal of pressure on you to support this legislation. I know that many of you fear being primaried by AIPAC if you don't comply. I know they are powerful lobby. And you will have to work to explain why you voted against something that, on the surface, sounds so reasonable, so supportable. I am asking you to take this moment seriously as a patriot, as an American. There is a fork in the road, and the choice is not a political one, but a moral one. Will you fulfill your oath to defend The Constitution and with it our freedoms, or will you throw our right to public dissent away and with it our democracy itself? I urge you to fulfill your oath.

Thank you.