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LD 1351

I am writing to express strong opposition to LD 1351. The IHRA definition, which conflates criticism of Israel with antisemitism, is widely rejected by human rights groups, Jewish and non-Jewish experts on Israel-Palestine, and the ACLU. In fact, the ACLU published an open letter in February 2024 calling for the rejection of antisemitism definitions that criminalize and curtail criticism of Israel, writing: "This definition of antisemitism conflates protected political speech with unprotected discrimination, and enshrining it into regulation will chill the exercise of First Amendment rights." (The full letter is here: <https://www.aclu.org/documents/reject-definitions-of-anti-semitism-that-encompass-protected-speech>.)

For Maine to adopt this definition now would advance the extreme right-wing agenda of the Trump administration and its allies to erode and degrade our right to free speech and legitimate dissent. It is absolutely urgent that we resist such efforts.

The IHRA definition does not promote equity and inclusiveness; it promotes authoritarian policing of speech.

Ultimately, Israel is a state. "State" is not a protected category of person, and criticism of a state cannot constitute discrimination. Criticizing Israel's actions is not antisemitic; it is vital and legitimate free speech. Moreover, much of the so-called "antisemitic" criticism of Israel is actually criticism of the U.S. government's actions to support the Israeli government. The right to criticize our own government (which is, once again, not antisemitic speech) is a core pillar of our democracy that must be defended more urgently than ever.

While the government of Israel is not a person and cannot be discriminated against in this way, Palestinians themselves *are* people. The IHRA definition seeks to criminalize nearly all Palestinian advocacy for their own rights, which must necessarily include criticism of the regime violating those rights. Thus, the IHRA definition seeks to entirely repress Palestinian speech on this issue, turning it into a one-sided debate. To elevate the Israeli state to the status of a person while erasing, repressing, and silencing the protected free speech of Palestinian-Americans and their allies reveals total dehumanization of Palestinian people.

Please reject this right-wing attempt to chill speech in Maine.