

David Souers  
Friendship  
LD 1351

LD 1351 - An Act to Require Anti-Semitism to Be Considered as Motivation When Determining a Violation of a Criminal or Civil Law.

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, Members of the committee, I am David Souers. I live in Friendship, Maine. I am not Jewish. However, I have been studying Jewish history for a long time with visits to the National Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, and many books read by various Israeli and American Jewish historians and scholars. I also read Haaretz, a daily Israeli news outlet which addresses the many conflicting views of Israeli Jews today as well as the damages done to all Jews by the continuing violence by and against Israelis.

I am testifying in opposition to LD 1351.

“Anti-Semitism” is a term or concept that has existed for a long time, used by various people under a variety of circumstances. The Encyclopedia Britannica provides a historical account of “anti-Semitism” starting with “antisemitism, hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious or racial group. The term anti-Semitism was coined in 1879 by the German agitator Wilhelm Marr to designate the anti-Jewish campaigns underway in central Europe at that time. Nazi anti-Semitism, which culminated in the Holocaust, had a racist dimension in that it targeted Jews because of their supposed biological characteristics”.

Discrimination, hostility and crimes against Jewish people for their religion, culture and biological differences does exist. But so does discrimination, hostility and crimes exist and occur against other groups of people. Group identity politics and antagonism is on the rise in the US and around the world. Jewish people are not alone nor unique in being harmed for their identity. To single out a particular group using a term that is so broadly used to address everything from hate crimes to a political disagreements, to slights or discomforts, while having no terms or similar protections for the same harms and discomforts for other groups provides a lack of justice for all rather than an effective justice for Jewish people. Such apparent privilege will contribute to anti-Semitism.

The term “anti-Semitism” is now used by some politically powerful groups to silence others who are critical of the State of Israel, or critical of U.S. policies that harm civilians attacked by Israeli military and settlers. Israel has endeavored to develop and maintain a Jewish majority in Israel since 1947. Israel has also proceeded to control more territory originally established by the UN to become a Palestinian state. This region had been substantially a majority of Muslims, with Christians about equal in numbers to Jews. Today, the majority in the region which includes Israel remains Muslim. This Israeli process has been discriminatory against non-Jews. The conflict is not an example of “anti-Semitism”. However, criticizing the means and methods used by Israel to maintain control is now called “antisemitism”. Many American and Israeli Jews are leading critics of Israel for its treatment of other religious and ethnic groups. They criticize Israel on university campuses, in organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace, and among many Jewish historians and scholars. These Jews are sometimes called “anti-Semitic” by Jews who unconditionally support Israel.

We should not attempt to enforce terms that we cannot effectively define and administer. We have “hate crime” definitions and laws that should address all group discrimination, hostility and crimes, including those against Jewish people.

I recommend reading Peter Beinart’s book “Being Jewish After The Destruction of Gaza: A Reckoning” to understand how complicated the issues are behind claims, accusations and enforcement of laws against “anti-Semitism”. It’s the acts that can be addressed as “hate crimes” that are important and appropriate to address.

I advocate that LD 1351 ought not to pass.