

Erica Asch  
Hallowell  
LD 1383

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and members of the committee:

My name is Erica Asch and I live in Hallowell. I am speaking today in strong opposition to LD 1383. Our state faces many problems. Each year I hope that our school budget will be passed. The costs to educate our kids are rising and I worry that my kids might not have access to music, drama, art, sports and other vital educational services. When I drive around my community of Augusta, I see people standing on the rotaries without a safe, warm place to stay in freezing weather. I hear from my friends and neighbors about rising healthcare costs and waiting months for important medical procedures. The citizens of our state rely on the legislature to address these concerns at home.

But LD 1383 does not do that. It inserts the legislature into foreign policy. This bill is impractical and can have a devastating effect on the Maine Public Employees Retirement System. In a time when every dollar counts, this bill would use our tax dollars not for education, healthcare, or housing, but to have staff members read countless reports in an attempt to become experts in international affairs and determine which companies to divest from. This is a distraction from the work that we need done, and that we have the ability to do, right here at home. Even if this bill passes, it is unclear how it will be implemented and it is doubtful that it will have any real impact on international situations.

Of course I am against genocide. We all are and the fact that I have to state that is ludicrous. This bill should be rejected because we need to focus on Maine's needs, not spend our time and resources wading into foreign policy.

But there is another part of this bill, which isn't directly stated, but is part of the discussion. This bill never explicitly mentions Israel, but as a Jewish community member and a rabbi, I feel the criticism of the world's only Jewish state. Even if that is not the intent, that is the impact. I have talked to community members who are afraid to come here today to testify; who fear publicly speaking against this bill because they worry that they will be branded as genocidal or racist. They fear for their safety. There is a price we pay for publicly stating that Israel has a right to exist. We see increases in Jewish hate right here in Central Maine—the doors of our synagogue remain locked for security. A bomb threat disrupted our religious education. My 13 year old daughter and our other teenage helpers had to evacuate children from our building as the police investigated. Those teenagers, scared themselves, reassured our four and five year olds that everything was fine, it was just a mechanical problem.

I urge you to focus your time, your energy, and our state resources on the needs of Maine communities and not to involve the state in potentially harmful actions, with no real impact on internal affairs. You have an ability to improve the lives of Mainers. I urge you to focus on Maine's needs and to oppose LD 1383.