

I would like to make a statement regarding my full support of H3, “An act relating ethnic and social equity studies standards for public schools.” I had hoped to contribute to testimony before the Education Committee on January 29, but as that was limited to members of the institutional Jewish community who had over the weekend voiced some concerns to the bill’s sponsors, so I am doing so here. I am also Jewish.

Relative to yesterday’s testimony on the importance of adding the subject of anti-Semitism to the bill, there is no doubt that anti-Semitism exists and is on the rise in Vermont, the U.S. and Europe (as is white supremacy and oppression against other marginalized groups). I would like to focus on two reasons for not specifically addressing anti-Semitism in the language of the bill.

1. The changing definition of anti-Semitism. Until the past few decades, anti-Semitism has been defined as acts of hatred, violence and exclusion against Jews as individuals or a group, simply because they are Jews. But under pressure from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, a new definition has been adopted by the U.S. State Department <https://www.state.gov/s/rga/resources/267538.htm> and by the U.S. Department of Education, which includes very concerning elements such as “the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity; 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.” The U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism also stands with Israel behind a 3 D’s definition – Demonize Israel, Double Standards for Israel and Delegitimize Israel. This means that criticizing the State of Israel for its 51 year occupation of Palestine, for its expulsion of indigenous Palestinians, theft of Palestinian land, ongoing human rights abuses and flagrant disregard for international law, is anti-Semitism. This matters because laws have been passed in 26 states that penalize criticism of Israel and just yesterday by the U.S. Senate. (See the links below)

2. Anti-BDS legislation. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, or BDS, is a non-violent international campaign originating in 2005 from Palestinian civil society organizations to bring international pressure on the State of Israel to comply with international law, end its occupation of Palestinian territory, allow for the right of return of Palestinian refugees, and give equal rights to all Palestinians. <https://bdsmovement.net/bnc> This is a growing campaign and movement in the U.S. and worldwide, modeled on the campaign which finally brought an end to apartheid in South Africa. The Israeli lobby (AIPAC and others) are working hard to discredit BDS as anti-Semitic on our college campuses, in churches, and our legislatures at the federal and state level, as noted above. Throwing the label of anti-Semitism at activists critical of the State of Israel and working for human rights for Palestinians silences the discussion and dissent so critical to a democracy; the ACLU has objected that these laws violate our first amendment rights

Anti-Semitism is *one of the many* causes of bullying and harassment in our schools, and will be explicitly included as curricula and guidelines are reviewed by the Advisory Board to be created by this bill. We must be careful about explicit singling out anti-Semitism that could very soon be illegal according to federal law. What if a child makes a report in class critical of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, that is, critical of Israel and therefore anti-Semitic? Given the current climate in the U.S., I believe it is important to keep this specific word out of the bill.

Alice Rothchild said, “Ultimately, anti-Semitism will only be defeated when white supremacy is defeated. While we agree to fight rising fascism, misogyny, bigotry, and all forms of oppression

against marginalized people, there will be disagreements, criticism, mistakes, difficult conversations.” We are having those conversations, but let’s pass H3.

26 states have enacted anti-BDS legislation or executive orders:

<https://palestinelegal.org/news/2016/6/3/what-to-know-about-anti-bds-legislation?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=cbdde3cc-86c4-49a4-b9ea-f8d1ee3bbb33&eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=70039bf4-4439-401d-a175-d239e285d6f7>

<https://unitedwithisrael.org/kentucky-becomes-26th-us-state-to-pass-anti-bds-law/>

Federal legislation that passed today in the Senate - Leahy and Saunders voted no. This bill doesn’t criminalize BDS support but penalizes individuals or companies that are engaged in BDS by denying them contracts.

<https://israelpalestineneews.org/first-senate-bill-of-2019-would-give-israel-billions-of-dollars-combat-bds/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=cbdde3cc-86c4-49a4-b9ea-f8d1ee3bbb33&eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=70039bf4-4439-401d-a175-d239e285d6f7>

ACLU opposition to a federal bill in 3/2018. There were a number of these bills in both US House and Senate last year that didn’t get through committees.

<https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-speech/rights-protesters/new-israel-anti-boycott-act-still-unconstitutional>

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