



CAIR
NEW JERSEY

**AMERICA'S LARGEST ISLAMIC CIVIL
LIBERTIES AND ADVOCACY GROUP**

Oppose Bill S1292 and S2937 to Protect Free Speech

March 18, 2024

Dear Senate President Nicholas P. Scutari, Senator James Beach, Senator James W. Holzapfel, Senator Gordon M. Johnson, Senator John F. McKeon, Senator Vincent Polistina, Senator Robert W. Singer, and Senator Shirley K. Turner,

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding Senate Bill 1292 and Senate Bill 2937, which both aim to redefine anti-Semitism using the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition. While we appreciate and support efforts to combat hate and discrimination, these bills carry consequences that would suppress legitimate advocacy and free speech. As a civil rights and advocacy organization closely involved in addressing the consequences of biased anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim rhetoric here in New Jersey, we urge you to reconsider supporting Senate Bill 1292 and Senate Bill 2937 for the following reasons:

- 1. Conflation of Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism:** The IHRA definition, if adopted, would equate anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism. It is essential to recognize that these are distinct concepts. While anti-Semitism targets Jewish people based on their religion, anti-Zionism critiques a contemporary political ideology. Criticizing Zionism does not equate to anti-Semitism. We must protect the right to criticize political beliefs without stifling legitimate discourse.
- 2. Impact on Palestinian Advocacy:** By labeling any criticism of Zionism as anti-Semitic, this bill would unfairly silence Palestinian advocacy and empowerment. Palestinians have a right to express their perspectives and call out policies that impact their lives. We should not conflate their legitimate concerns for life with hatred. These bills attempt to weaponize anti-Semitism.
- 3. Defending Free Speech:** As Americans, we cherish our First Amendment rights. These bills risk undermining free speech by discouraging open dialogue. We can combat anti-Semitism without stifling dissenting voices. The New Jersey Senate should reject these bills because they violate the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The IHRA definition, along with its examples, is driven by political motives, aiming to silence Palestinians and their allies while shielding the Israeli government from accountability for its blatant disregard for human life and purposeful scale of destruction. It would tarnish New Jersey's reputation in support of free speech and diversity.

In conclusion, we implore you to consider the broader implications of these bills. Let us protect free speech, advocate for justice, and ensure that our legislation reflects the values of an open and democratic society.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We trust that you will carefully weigh the consequences and make an informed decision that upholds our constitutional principles. We urge you to oppose any attempt to codify the IHRA definition into law or policy. Your votes against S1292 & S2937 are crucial in upholding our fundamental rights and advancing genuine efforts to combat discrimination.

Sincerely,
CAIR New Jersey