



## **Testimony for House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee**

### **HJ0005 Commitment to Free Speech, Academic Freedom, and Open Public Discourse**

**February 20th, 2024**

#### **FAVORABLE**

The DC Metro Chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace respectfully urges the members of the House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee to favorably pass HJ0005 - Commitment to Free Speech, Academic Freedom, and Open Public Discourse.

Jewish Voice for Peace is a national organization that advocates for social justice, equality, and freedom for all people, with over 750,000 members and supporters nationwide. Like generations of Jewish American progressives before us, we work toward freedom and justice for Palestinians and Israelis.

Jewish Voice for Peace-DC Metro represents JVP members and supporters who live in the DC metro area, including those who reside in Montgomery and Prince George Counties, as well as in the District of Columbia and northern Virginia.

We believe that this resolution is essential for demonstrating that the Maryland General Assembly is committed to protecting all Marylanders' free speech rights. In addition, we believe this bill can help protect students, teachers, professors and other academics from discrimination, hate and violence when they openly express condemnation of Israeli policies and actions regarding Palestinian rights, including Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza.

If this resolution had been in place this fall, it could have prevented the suspension of four teachers employed by the Montgomery County School System for expressing support for Palestinian rights. It would help to prevent public school teachers, administrators and other staff employed by Maryland's publicly funded schools and colleges from penalizing students who are involved in student walkouts, and/or from engaging in other activities for expressing unpopular political views.

We assume that all members of the General Assembly fully support the provisions provided under the U.S. Bill of Rights regarding free speech and open public discourse. It is time for the General Assembly to reiterate that commitment, and to ensure that all Maryland residents can openly express views about the current devastating loss of lives and destruction taking place with U.S. tax dollars anywhere in the world, including the Middle East, without being subjected to suppression of speech, verbal attacks, acts of hatred and violence.

For the aforementioned reasons, we urge all members of this committee to vote in favor of HJ0005.