



**Maryland General Assembly
House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee**

March 11, 2024

Testimony of Meredith R. Weisel

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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony **to express concern** regarding *House Joint Resolution 5, Commitment to Free Speech, Academic Freedom, and Open Public Discourse*.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” As a leading anti-hate organization, for decades one of the most important ways in which ADL has fought against bigotry and antisemitism has been by investigating extremist threats across the ideological spectrum, producing research to inform the public, and working with law enforcement, educators, the tech industry, and elected leaders to promote best practices to effectively counter these concerns.

As a staunch defender of civil rights and civil liberties, including the rights enshrined in the First Amendment, ADL supports Maryland’s commitment to upholding free speech, academic freedom, and the right of individuals to express views on matters of foreign policy. We share the view that free and open public discourse is essential to the functioning of a healthy democracy. At the same time, however, we have concerns regarding the apparent intent and possible impact of HJ5, which appears to be singularly focused on protecting the right to criticize Israel.

ADL firmly believes that criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country is not and should not be regarded as antisemitic. However, applying double standards to Israel by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation, is a form of antisemitism, as set forth in the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism – the most widely accepted definitional and learning tool used around the world when it comes to understanding manifestations of antisemitism today.

By singling out criticism of Israel as uniquely worthy of protection, this resolution seems to suggest that Israel is uniquely deserving of reproach. It also may give cover – whether intentionally or not – to antisemitism in the form of criticism leveled against Israel that is not leveled against any other democracy, or in the form of calling the existence of the State of Israel a racist endeavor. By singling out Israel and/or failing to simultaneously condemn these manifestations of antisemitism, this resolution risks excusing this pernicious form of hate. These potential consequences are particularly concerning at a time when, in the wake of October 7th, antisemitism is surging, antisemitic attitudes and beliefs are rising, and ADL is tracking extreme expressions of anti-Zionism, a form of antisemitism, in the public discourse.

**We accordingly urge the House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee to give
House Joint Resolution 5 as currently written an unfavorable report.**