

Dear Delegates Solomon, Bofo, Cardin, Ebersole, Edelson, Fair, Foley, Forbes, D. Jones, Kaiser, Kaufman, Lehman, R. Lewis, Spiegel, and Vogel -

My name is Meliha Anthony and I am a senior at St. John's College in Annapolis, MD. As a college student who is committed to free speech, I have concerns about House Bill 1462. Similar opinions to those stated in the bill have been used across the country in the past year and a half to silence student protesters on college campuses, specifically peaceful protests regarding the genocide in Palestine. While this bill proclaims to protect students from discrimination, I believe that it would infringe upon our first amendment right to free speech.

I have doubts about the effectiveness and truth of the bill's attempt to mitigate discrimination. Some of the language in the bill is slippery, speaking about "Combating Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and Other Forms of Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Violence, Harassment, and Intimidation; and generally relating to antihate and antidiscrimination policies at institutions of higher education," and "Institutional preparation for and response to expressive activity on campus that disrupts educational activities or threatens public safety," to list a couple of examples. We know from watching the news that just displaying the Palestinian flag or saying the words "from the river to the sea" has been construed as anti-semitic or even pro-terrorist; yet, displaying the Israel flag or speaking in favor of Israel has never been labeled as Islamophobic. So despite this bill's supposed attempt at combating *both* anti-semitism and Islamophobia, I have serious doubts that it will be fairly carried out to prevent a double standard. I also worry about the requirement for schools to allow "anonymous" complaints of discrimination, without even verifying the truth of these claims – this in itself could easily turn into an opportunity for discrimination and false allegations targeting other minority groups. In a time when our democracy is generally under threat by the new administration, we have a responsibility to stand up for our values and not join the trend towards censorship and oppression. Please think carefully about the broader implications and dangerous precedent this bill would set for our right to free speech – a hallmark of our democracy which should be preserved at all costs.

Sincerely,
Meliha Anthony