



Chairs Feldman and Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

I am writing on behalf of **Prince George's 4 Palestine**, a grassroots community organizing group based in Prince George's County, Maryland. We are a 500-member strong organization committed to advocating for Palestinian liberation and justice. Many of us, like myself, are Jewish.

I write in strong opposition to SB0847, which purports to protect students from discrimination and hate. It is far more likely to do precisely the opposite.

On campuses across America, students protesting America's sponsorship of a genocide in Palestine have been targeted with claims of hate speech. Thousands of student protesters have been arrested, threatened with expulsion, and/or had their student organizations deauthorized. Many of those students accused of antisemitism have been –as I am–Jewish. We have seen similar behavior in our own county's higher education institutions. Just last year at the University of Maryland, a pro-Palestine student group had to [fight in the courts](#) for permission to hold a vigil for the dead in Gaza. Meanwhile, Israel Fest, held annually at UMD, is typically celebrated with minimal disruption or scrutiny, despite that country's consistent and flagrant violation of international human rights law.

While antisemitism does exist on college campuses, a vanishingly small proportion of the protests and protesters being targeted have actually engaged in hate speech. As a Jew, it breaks my heart to watch the very real problem of antisemitism be weaponized to silence any mention of Palestinian life, the value of Palestinian life, or the goal of peace.

Because this is a moment of such intense repression targeted at a single social movement, the timing of this bill is worrisome. While it purports to address a range of discriminatory speech acts, it seems far more likely that the bill will enable stepped-up repression against pro-Palestine protesters, not broad protections for all vulnerable groups. It is especially concerning that the Maryland Legislative Jewish Caucus, which has a track record of conflating anti-Zionism with antisemitism and [working legislatively to silence pro-Palestinian voices](#), has supported this bill.

We note several features of SB0847 that are especially troubling.

- 1) The reporting requirement incentivizes campus administrators to repress disfavored speech, particularly speech that is likely to attract media attention, and risks that **campus administrators will chill speech that is perceived to be controversial**, such as anti-war expressive activities.
- 2) The requirement to allow the submission of anonymous complaints creates an **opportunity for individuals to abuse anonymity to lodge baseless complaints against those with whom they have a personal or ideological conflict**. Even in cases where the wrongfully accused are ultimately cleared, the investigation process will be onerous and traumatizing, and may have lasting reputational repercussions.
- 3) **Time/place/manner restrictions create an onerous, confusing, and labyrinthine process that discourages student activists from exercising their free speech rights** and creates opportunities for students engaging in disfavored speech to be punished for minor technical violations.
- 4) Requirements that all institutions commit to involving security or law enforcement for political expression that causes (self-defined) “significant disruption” is the wrong direction for Maryland during this time when we have so many threats to liberty to resist.
- 5) The University of Maryland has announced large budget cuts based on the Governor’s budget. **The FY2026 budget can not afford this \$500,000 allocation**, which will effectively force additional defunding of core (educational) functions.
- 6) The Hate-Bias report central to the bill’s reporting requirements and enforcement is not a comprehensive picture of the experiences of marginalized people in Maryland, because discrimination against and attacks on Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian communities are under-reported and under-recognized.

We recognize the good intentions behind this bill– a desire for safety and inclusion for all students. But this bill will not make students safer. Given the history of campus enforcement, we cannot trust that policies like this will be deployed fairly, and in service of targeting genuine hate speech. It is far more likely to become a weapon in the arsenal of those who wish to silence free speech and stifle a peaceful social movement unpopular with some in power.

We urge you to reject SB0847 and stand with your constituents against targeted repression of free speech.

Sincerely,

Jess Epstein

Prince George’s 4 Palestine