

Friday, March 7, 2025



Dear Committee Members,

I am submitting this testimony as a member of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) Baltimore, is a national grassroots Jewish organization in support of Palestinian rights with over 10,000 supporters in Maryland, as well as chapters in Baltimore, the DC Metro area, and at University of Maryland College Park. I am a resident of Baltimore City and District 41. I am testifying in **strong support of HB 1460, State Procurement - Prohibited Certifications - Boycotts of Foreign Countries.**

JVP strongly supports this bill, which protects the crucial right to boycott, a key tactic in nonviolent campaigns against injustice. The bill does protect this right by overturning an Executive Order (EO) that limits the ability to participate in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against the State of Israel.

Governor Hogan's EO willfully misstates the fundamental purpose and rationale for BDS in order to limit protected political speech. Specifically, the EO misrepresents the BDS movement by asserting that those participating in a boycott of Israel are engaging in antisemitic discrimination "because of [a person or entity's] Israeli national origin, or residence or incorporation in Israel and its territories."

In actuality, the stated aims of the BDS movement are to force change to the Israeli government's discriminatory policies toward Palestinians and its occupation of Palestinian land. As such, **the forms of political boycott promoted by the BDS movement should be considered protected speech based on the Supreme Court ruling stating that "boycotts to 'bring about political, social, and economic change' are a form of political speech."**

Attacks on freedom of speech are rapidly proliferating in America. Anti-BDS laws and policy such as Governor Hogan's EO set yet another dangerous precedent for restricting free speech on other issues. For example, other bills have been introduced to prohibit shareholders from voting based on environmental, social, or governance criteria and to prevent governments from contracting with entities that "discriminate" against the firearm and ammunition industries or that boycott oil, gas, mining, or energy production companies.

Bills to put these restrictions in place in Maryland failed to pass the legislature, leading to Governor Hogan's Executive Order. This indicates that these restrictions are not the will of the people, and our laws should reflect that.

Many Jewish Marylanders, including many of the 10,000 Marylanders who are members of JVP, are committed to participating in the BDS movement. Regardless of one's views on the BDS movement, Maryland must not enable further attacks on protected political speech by allowing this EO to stand.

It is for all these reasons that I am encouraging you to **support HB 1460, State Procurement - Prohibited Certifications - Boycotts of Foreign Countries.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dr. Katherine Blaha
5706 Cross Country Blvd
Baltimore, MD 21209
Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) Baltimore