

March 7, 2024

Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee, Maryland House of Delegates

Dear Delegate Pena-Melnyk,

We are grateful for this opportunity to offer written testimony **IN FAVOR OF** this legislation now being deliberated in the Maryland Assembly:

House Bill 1460

“State Procurement - Prohibited Certifications - Boycotts of Foreign Countries”

This bill seeks to **reverse** the attack on American’s First Amendment right to Free Speech that was aimed at us by then-Governor Larry Hogan, who signed an [executive order](#) in October 2017 that prohibits the state from doing business with companies engaged in a boycott of Israel.

Today is the 60th anniversary of [Bloody Sunday](#). A group of about 525 African-American demonstrators had gathered at Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church to demand the right to vote and to begin a march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. When they attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, they were met by more than 50 state troopers and a few dozen posse-men on horseback. They were beaten and forced to turn back.

We are reminded by US Congressman Al Green (Dem; TX, Dist. 9) today on [Democracy Now](#) (WPFW) that we must each be prepared to suffer the consequences of our protests for freedom.

As Americans, our freedom of speech, and our right to practice the values of our religion have been under attack for some time, and we resist, as shown in the documentary [BOYCOTT](#).

As early as 2017, the Social Justice Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Rockville, Maryland, [published a statement](#) calling on the then-governor to rescind his executive action.

In 2024, hoping to halt the ongoing US-enabled genocide in Gaza, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) [passed a resolution](#) at its annual, national meeting, in solidarity with Palestinians, calling for a stop to indiscriminate violence in Gaza, a permanent ceasefire, for an end to U.S. military aid to Israel, and for UU congregations to join the [Apartheid Free Communities](#).

Today, the [Heritage Foundation’s Project Esther](#) is waging a campaign to stifle any civic organization that criticizes U.S. policy in support of Israel’s apartheid regime. We will resist and prepare to suffer the consequences of our resistance. Free speech in the United States will not die. House Bill 1460 is but a tool for freedom. Let us pick it up off the table and use it to reclaim our free society.

Sincerely,

Steven Sellers ([Muskra](#)) Lapham

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Writing my own opinion. I am a member of UUCR; a board member of [UUs for Justice in the Middle East](#); and on the steering committee of [Voices From the Holy Land Online Film Salon](#).