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Dear Delegates Young, Acevero, Alston, and Martinez

I am writing as a concerned constituent of the state of Maryland to express my strong support for the reversal of the state's executive order prohibiting state agencies from contracting with businesses that support the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. This order, issued by former Governor Larry Hogan in 2017, not only undermines the fundamental rights guaranteed by the First Amendment but also sets a dangerous precedent for government overreach into matters of free speech and political expression.

The right to boycott is a well-established form of peaceful protest protected by the Constitution. In *NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware Co.* (1982), the Supreme Court affirmed that boycotts to bring about social, political, and economic change are a form of speech, association, and assembly protected under the First Amendment. Maryland's anti-BDS order directly infringes upon these rights by imposing unconstitutional restrictions on individuals and businesses that choose to take a principled stand on international human rights issues.

Furthermore, this executive order compels businesses and individuals to affirm positions that they may not agree with in order to access public contracts, which amounts to unconstitutional compelled speech. The government should not have the power to force its citizens to take specific political positions as a condition of doing business with the state. Such mandates create an environment where individuals and organizations must choose between their deeply held beliefs and their ability to work with the government.

Beyond the constitutional concerns, Maryland's anti-BDS order undermines our state's commitment to democratic principles and free debate. It is not the role of our government to silence dissenting voices or punish those who advocate for nonviolent economic protest as a means of pursuing justice. Why would any entity be barred from boycotting a regime committing atrocities against civilians, medical workers, and journalists? Why can they support the State of

Israel's actions, but not oppose them when they violate international standards? Regardless of one's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is essential that our state upholds the constitutional freedoms that form the bedrock of our democracy.

Our government should not dictate political beliefs or use economic coercion to suppress viewpoints. I call on any lawmaker to stand up for the First Amendment and ensure that Maryland remains a state that values and protects the free expression of all its citizens.

Sincerely,

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