



Testimony in Opposition to SB0709
Presented by Prince George's 4 Palestine

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings 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.

We are deeply concerned about SB0709, a bill that criminalizes public masking on the grounds that masked persons may assault or harass others with impunity.

Bills like this have been attempted all over the country, not to protect the public from dangerous hate speech –Proud Boy and KKK events, for instance—but to specifically target peaceful activists asking the US Government to stop sponsoring a genocide in Palestine.

Members of our group come from all walks of life. Many of us are Jews horrified by a genocide being sponsored by our tax dollars and in our name. Others are retired teachers and academics, representatives of Christian and Muslim faith communities, civil servants, lawyers, social justice advocates, and students. We use our first amendment rights to speak for peace and human rights, and we often do so wearing masks. We do not do this to commit assaults with impunity! We do this to protect ourselves from disease, or to prevent malicious personal targeting –which we have seen occur to others – by pro-Israel activists.

Bills like this will criminalize our activism - peaceful, legal activism – and undermine our ability to exercise our free speech rights.

The bill gives police discretion to determine when and how to enforce the law. Given historical patterns of police discrimination, we have no confidence that this bill will be enforced equitably. It seems likely that enforcement will be focused on people of color – as all police action tends to be. It will also, necessarily, penalize those who are disabled or immunocompromised. Bills that give law enforcement the ability to charge Black and brown citizens wearing masks *in the age of pandemics* are going to end with persecution of Black and brown people, and particularly of Black and brown disabled people.

As one of many Jewish members of the group, I also want to stress that the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which supports this bill, does not speak for me. It does not speak for any of us.

We urge you to reject SB0709 and to stand up for the principles of free speech, human rights, and justice. Our group will continue to advocate for Palestinian rights, and we will not be silenced by laws that seek to criminalize our activism. It is critical that Maryland does not follow in the footsteps of other states that have passed similar laws designed to suppress dissent.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. We trust that you will stand with your constituents, protecting their right to peacefully protest and speak out against injustice.

Sincerely,
Dan Broder
Prince George's 4 Palestine