

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1394

*Civil Actions - Nonprofit Organizations - Unauthorized Support of Israeli Settlement Activity
(Not On Our Dime Act)*

House Judiciary Committee

March 5, 2025

As a lifelong Maryland resident and advocate for human rights, I strongly support HB 1394, which will prohibit non-profit organizations in Maryland from advancing illegal settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and create a legal pathway to compensation for affected parties. The bill defines prohibited activities as those banned under the Geneva Conventions, including the unlawful transfer of civilians into occupied territory, acts of settler violence, crimes against property, blocking access to and annexing Palestinian lands, forced displacement, and the destruction of infrastructure. The bill also requires the Maryland Secretary of State to remove non-profits found in violation from the Registry of Charitable Solicitation.

For Palestinians, Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank brings extreme violence, dispossession, and forced displacement. In Hebron, for example, horrific acts of settler violence and the occupying Israeli army have pushed thousands of Palestinian residents from the City Center, and hundreds of Palestinian businesses and residences have been shuttered.¹ Olive trees, central to the Palestinian economy, are systematically removed by the occupying army and settlers in an effort to destroy Palestinian livelihoods.² These land grabs have only intensified since 2023.³ As of this year, three West Bank refugee camps have been violently cleared of their residents.⁴

In 2015, I visited the West Bank and saw firsthand the horrors of the Israeli Occupation, including many of the prohibited activities outlined in this bill. I met families whose homes had been broken into at all hours of the night, vandalized by the Israeli army. I saw settlers, many of whom are U.S. citizens, disrupt the Muslim call to prayer at Ibrahimi Mosque, chanting “Death to Arabs.” Soon after returning to the U.S.,

¹ Feuerstein, O. (2007). Ghost town: Israel's separation policy and forced eviction of Palestinians from the center of Hebron. B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories and The Association for Civil Rights in Israel. ISSN 0793-520X.

https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200705_hebron

² Hedroug, L. (2023, March 11). Israel's Campaign Against Palestinian Olive Trees. The Yale Review of International Studies.

<https://yris.yira.org/column/israels-campaign-against-on-palestinian-olive-trees/>

³ B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. (2025, January 22). 2024 West Bank olive harvest: Israel furthers land grab through tighter restrictions on Palestinians and extreme state violence.

https://www.btselem.org/video/20250122_2024_west_bank_olive_harvest_israel_furthers_land_grab_through_tighter_restrictions_on_palestinians_and_extreme_state_violence#full

⁴ Bennett, T. (2025, February 23). Israel expels residents of three West Bank refugee camps. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg70r9enm7po>

a Palestinian mother and activist who I met in the town of Nabi Saleh, while nonviolently protesting the annexation of her land, was shot with live ammunition by Israeli soldiers.⁵ I wondered—and continue to wonder—how these actions, illegal under international law,⁶ could go unchecked.

U.S. non-profit organizations, including in Maryland, are crucial to the violent architecture of Israeli settlement enterprise.⁷ For example, organizations like the Jewish National Fund, superficially known as a tree-planting organization, use subsidiaries to illegally acquire land in the West Bank for Israeli settlements.⁸ In 2015, a Haaretz investigation revealed over \$220 million in tax-exempt funds used to advance settlement activity.⁹ The Guardian more recently documented how crowdfunding campaigns are used for this purpose.¹⁰ Yet, there is little public acknowledgement of this fact, and no legal consequences for these organizations, who continually violate international—and likely domestic U.S. discrimination law—through their actions.

Non-profit organizations in Maryland should not be allowed to take advantage of their tax status in order to promote Israeli settlement activities, which violate international law and human rights. As a Maryland taxpayer, I am ashamed that our nonprofit sector may be used to funnel financial and logistical support to a foreign government and its civilian actors, who repeatedly violate the Geneva Conventions and enact extreme violence with impunity. **HB 1394 creates a necessary legal mechanism by which nonprofits can be held accountable for these actions.**

I urge the committee to report favorably HB 1394 to the full House.

⁵ Activestills. (2015, April 5). Photos: Soldiers fire live ammo, wound two in Nabi Saleh protest. <https://www.972mag.com/photos-soldiers-fire-live-ammo-wound-two-in-nabi-saleh-protest/>

⁶ United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). (2024, September 13). Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. UN Doc A/ES-10/L.31/Rev.1. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/ES-10/L.31/Rev.1>

⁷ Hodges, E. (2022, June 10). Hidden in plain sight: U.S. nonprofits as drivers of illegal Israeli settlements. Just Security. <https://www.justsecurity.org/81847/hidden-in-plain-sight-us-nonprofits-as-drivers-of-illegal-israeli-settlements/>

⁸ DAWN MENA. (2025, January 17). US: Sanction Jewish National Fund-Israel (KKL-JNF) for Funding Settlement Expansion and Fostering Settler Violence. [https://dawnmena.org/us-sanction-jewish-national-fund-israel-kl-jnf-for-funding-settlement-expansion-and-fostering-settler-violence/#:~:text=KKL%2DJNF%2C%20the%20124%2Doccupied%20Palestinian%20territory%20\(OPT\)%2C](https://dawnmena.org/us-sanction-jewish-national-fund-israel-kl-jnf-for-funding-settlement-expansion-and-fostering-settler-violence/#:~:text=KKL%2DJNF%2C%20the%20124%2Doccupied%20Palestinian%20territory%20(OPT)%2C)

⁹ Blau, U. Haaretz investigation: U.S. donors gave settlements more than \$220 million in tax-exempt funds Over five years. Haaretz. <https://www.haaretz.com/2015-12-07/ty-article/haaretz-investigates-u-s-donors-to-israeli-settlements/0000017f-f6bb-d460-afff-ffffd93e0000>

¹⁰ Wilson, J. (2023, December 23). Revealed: how US residents are funding illegal settlements in the West Bank. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/23/crowdfunding-us-residents-fund-settlements-west-bank>