

Favorable Testimony In Support of HB1455: State Retirement and Pension System – Divestment From Israel

Dear Chair Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I urge the House Appropriations Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1455. Maryland's State Retirement and Pension System holds \$65.5 million of investments in Israeli bonds as of this past December. These unconditional loans to the Israeli treasury provide critical financial support for Israel's continued forced displacement, starvation, and bombings in Gaza, as well as surging Israeli settler attacks, illegal settlement construction, and military operations in the occupied West Bank. Among the many groups tracking the ongoing violence, the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem offers a thorough report; the link is below.

Israel's brutal system of oppression of Palestinians directly conflicts with our pension system's public commitments to socially responsible investing, and obligations as a signatory of the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment. The pension system's own Investment Policy Manual outlines steps to protect human rights.

Not only do the pension system's Israeli sovereign bonds invest in oppression, they present significant financial risks that threaten the retirement security of the state's 420,000 public employees and retirees. The three top global credit rating agencies have downgraded Israel's credit rating since Oct. 7th, 2023, citing "the ongoing military conflict and increased geopolitical risks."

Because of our own government's funding of, and providing arms for, the atrocities being committed in Gaza and the West Bank – and now Lebanon and elsewhere – US citizens have a special duty to prevent these atrocities and to hold accountable those committing them. We are in fact complicit in the horror that Palestinians are living and dying in when we are giving or loaning money to the Israeli government. We do not have the choice to turn away from that horror or to refuse to speak to one another about it. We have been seeing livestreamed the bombing and burning alive of people living in tents, the killing and maiming of children, the execution of journalists, doctors and nurses, and bombing of hospitals. And that killing and maiming has continued, day after day, after the so-called ceasefire that the Trump administration declared.

What the Palestinians are suffering through is hard to face squarely. But since we are enabling these acts financially, we *must* face what is happening. We cannot turn away. And we must act to eliminate the ways that we are contributing to the horror. As Marylanders, the first thing we must do is to stop using our retirement fund to support violence and oppression.

I want to be able to live with myself and how I acted in the face of all this horrific violence. You do too. You can take action now, today, by giving a favorable report for HB1455.

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Link to B'Tselem report: https://www.btselem.org/publications/202507_our_genocide