

March 17, 2026

To: Chairman Darryl Barnes
House Appropriations Committee
230 Taylor House Office Building Annapolis, MD 21401

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

Position: FAVORABLE

I am a first generation Palestinian and I've lived in Maryland for more than half of my life, specifically in Anne Arundel county. To know that the state that I live in helps and funds the occupier of my land is a feeling I do not wish on anyone. 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 Dec. 2024. 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.

The Zionist entity's brutal system of oppression over Palestinians and my homeland 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."

As a Palestinian resident of Maryland, I want my tax dollars to be invested instead in our local communities. As Maryland lawmakers, it's also your responsibility to ensure that our state's public employees, who work hard to preserve our state's excellent quality of life, can depend upon financially sound and ethical investments on the part of our state's pension system.

For these reasons I respectfully urge a favorable report for HB1455.

Taylor Habib

Odenton, Maryland