

My name is Jeremy Levinger, and I am a proud Jewish-American educator working for Baltimore City Public Schools and a member of the Baltimore Teachers Union and the Baltimore Chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace. I am writing to demonstrate my support for House Bill 1455, which would divest my retirement and pension funds from funding internationally recognized war crimes committed by Israel, which amount to nothing short of genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.

I vividly remember an unpleasant surprise from my synagogue which taught me the truth of adulthood. This shock was not that the Chanukah Fairy was fictional, but rather that not all charity is honest about its intentions and recipients. Many Jewish religious schools collect tzedakah (charity) weekly that students donate. In my case, I did chores around my house to earn an allowance and then donated a portion to the little blue box in my Sunday school class each week. I later found out that these little blue boxes, distributed to almost every synagogue in America, were owned by the Jewish National Fund, which has a longstanding policy of displacing Palestinians. They also have planted many non-native species of trees that damage local ecosystems, and have destroyed olive groves and kicked Bedouins out of their villages in the Naqab/Negev desert.

I had the same disgusted and betrayed feeling when I discovered that my retirement and pension funds were being invested into Israeli bonds. Essentially, without my will, I was helping write blank checks to a government committing a brutal occupation against a civilian population. From Israel carpet bombing schools and hospitals, to Israel using hunger as a means of torture against an entire population, I have many reasons to strongly oppose my hard-earned wages being used in this manner.

To make matters worse, we live in Baltimore, one of the most segregated cities in America, which is well documented in Morgan State University Professor Lawrence T. Brown's book *Black Butterfly*. All across the district I have witnessed College and Career Readiness programs defunded, crucial positions cut, after-school tutoring sessions eliminated, and a desperate need for more cultural liaisons and translators. Baltimore has so much potential yet when our schools are this critically underfunded, our youth are severely neglected. Educators like myself should get to invest their retirement and pension funds into programming, wrap-around services, and translation for the youth and families of Baltimore, not into genocide and destruction of innocent Palestinians. Therefore, as an educator and as a member of the Baltimore chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace, I strongly urge legislators in Maryland to support House Bill 1455. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Jeremy Levinger