

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

Dear Chair Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am writing to you as a life-long Marylander, Jew, voter, mother of an MSRPS active member, wife of a past MSRPS member, concerned world citizen, and advocate committed to human rights, accountability, and responsible spending, and for all of these reasons I respectfully and strenuously **urge you to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1455, the State Retirement and Pension System-- Divestment from Israel Act.**

State of Maryland employees, including my daughter, deserve to be able to save for retirement knowing that their dollars are invested wisely in profitable accounts but also invested responsibly in accordance with the UN Principles for Responsible Investing (PRI) standards that the MSRPS signed on to in 2008¹. In 2022, the PRI Board approved a Human Rights Policy² recognizing that "The commitment to respect human rights is integral to our values, mission and six Principles that underpin our work" and stating a commitment to "Respect human rights as codified under international law." By continuing to hold investments in Israeli bonds, MSRPS is failing this commitment to socially responsible investing. The MSRPS is failing its commitment because Israeli bonds are unconditional loans to the Israeli government used to fund its actions, including Israel's military and police force used against the Palestinian people, living in Gaza, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and within Israel, which have been declared violations of human rights under international law.

The following are just a few quotes from the Resolution adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council on April 2, 2025³, regarding the Israeli government's violations of human rights under international law, which are supported by Israeli bond investments:

*Deplo*ring plans, policies and actions aimed at displacing the Palestinian people individually or collectively, inside or outside their homeland, or at forced displacement, exile or deportation of any form, under any circumstances and for whatever reason, which constitute a grave violation of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention,

Expressing deep concern that the sale, diversion and transfer of arms and jet fuel increase the ability of Israel, the occupying Power, to commit serious violations, including attacks

¹ https://sra.maryland.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/esg_risk_committee_report_-_february_2022_-_final.pdf

² https://unpri.my.salesforce.com/sfc/p/#7000000096Rp/a/PL00000UnnCq/96MTSa4me9Cv_.2s_tkCbZdHVQZSV_XNuodtJxcmD1E

³ <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/human-rights-council-adopted-resolution-human-rights-situation-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory-including-east-jerusalem-and-the-obligation-to-ensure-accountability-and-justice-a-hrc-res-58-2/>

against civilians and civilian infrastructures, disregard international law and seriously undermine the enjoyment of human rights,

Expressing grave concern further at the documented use of sexual violence, including rape, sexual harassment and public humiliation, as a tool of oppression against Palestinians, and recognizing the findings of the Commission of Inquiry with regard to the targeting of women and girls, particularly through attacks on maternity hospitals, the denial of reproductive healthcare and the use of starvation as a method of warfare, with specific impacts on maternal health,

Deploring the grave consequences of the conflict in and around the Gaza Strip, including the high number of casualties, in particular among Palestinian civilians, including infants, children, women, youth, civil society actors, lawyers, journalists and other media workers, medical personnel, humanitarian aid workers and the highest number of United Nations staff killed anywhere in the world during a conflict, as well as ongoing violations of international law, and calling for full respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law and for the principles of legality, distinction, precaution and proportionality,

Deploring all policies and practices whereby Israeli settlers who reside illegally in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, are accorded preferential treatment over the Palestinian population, and deploring also the widespread violations of the human rights of Palestinian civilians, including as a result of recurrent and escalating terror attacks by settlers, which are conducted with full impunity,

And

Calls upon all States to cease the sale, transfer and diversion of arms, munitions and other military equipment to Israel, the occupying Power, in order to prevent further violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights, and to refrain, in accordance with international norms and standards, from the export, sale or transfer of surveillance goods and technologies and less-lethal weapons, including “dual-use” items, when they assess that there are reasonable grounds to suspect that such goods, technologies or weapons might be used to violate or abuse human rights, and recalls the order of the International Court of Justice of 26 January 2024;

As a Jew growing up in Maryland, I heard all my life how we must support the State of Israel as our homeland; that Jews are safer because we have Israel; and that we must always defend Israel against the Arabs who want to destroy it and want to kill all Jews. However, as an educated adult, with a grown adult child, I have learned that these sentiments are not only false, but they are also racist, and that they were lies told over and over again until enough people believed so strongly that they were true. The reality is that the State of Israel is occupying the homeland of

the Palestinians; that because Israel claims to be acting on behalf of all Jews, Jews are less safe when Israel attacks innocent civilian populations because the world blames us Jews; and that any statement about “the Arabs” is inherently racist because Arabs are a diverse group of people, many of whom have absolutely nothing against Jews in general, and whose only issue with Israel is that it was built on Arab land, killed and abused Arabs in the process, and keeps attacking its majority Arab neighbors.

As a Jewish concerned world citizen, I am a strong believer in two particular Jewish teachings: *tikkun olam* and *pikuach nefesh*. *Tikkun olam* is generally repairing the world, it is the teaching that as Jews, it is our personal responsibility that we must each stand up and speak out for social justice and human rights, to fix what is wrong with the world. *Pikuach nefesh* is generally that the most important commandment is preservation of life. That there is no higher commandment and that this commandment is so important it mandates ignoring other commandments. If any person’s life is in danger, Jews are to be compelled to save them. These two Jewish teachings compel me to do whatever I can to stop Israel from killing Palestinians, from killing Lebanese, from killing Iranians, etc. **Is it because of these two Jewish teachings that I respectfully urge you to please help repair the world and preserve lives by divesting from Israel by supporting HB 1455. I urge you to please issue a favorable report on HB 1455.**

Thank you very much for your service.