

## **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 a public school teacher in the state of Maryland. Along with educators across the state, I believe that the welfare of children and young people should be our highest priority. We strive to be mentors and role models for our students, and that includes doing everything in our power to stop investing in a state that is actively [starving, maiming, and traumatizing children](#) while also denying them education, water, homes, and basic healthcare. Israel is [committing genocide](#) and ethnic cleansing. These conditions are not opinion or hearsay—they are facts. 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. Just this past week, [Israeli soldiers murdered](#) a mother, father, and two of their four children as they were driving to get new Eid clothes in the West Bank. The two surviving children witnessed this massacre. What happens to them now? It is painful enough to have billions our tax dollars supporting this [apartheid state](#), we don't need our pension fund invested in it, too.

Israel's brutal system of oppression over 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. We cannot in good conscience say we support human rights with words, but then turn around and fund human rights violations and crimes against humanity.

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 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.

Roseann Saah