

Testimony In favor of HB1455: State Retirement and Pension System-Divestment from Israel

To The Appropriations Committee

Greetings

My name is Robert Alex Stubblefield and I am a poet, author, activist-organizer and lay minister-theologian and member of organizations such as The Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition, Black United Front of Moco, Moco Liberation Collective, DSA and a host of other orgs. I also am a Maryland resident and I am writing in favor of HB1455. My reasons are explained below.

The first reason why I am supporting this bill is because quite frankly it is the right thing to do. Maryland has a history of divesting from foreign governments that have violated human rights laws. These include South African during Apartheid in 1984, Sudan and Iran in 2008 and most recently Russia in 2022. These examples show that we know that we don't want to be associated with blood money and that our retirement bonds should not be propping up unjust regimes. Considering that currently Israel has been charged with genocide and human rights abuses not only by the ICC and ICJ, but also other human rights orgs like Doctors against Genocide, Human Rights Watch etc have all found that Israel is continually committing human rights violations. Why would we continue to allow our pension system to be involved. Especially since our pension systems have publicly committed to socially responsible investing and obligations as being a signatory to the United Nations Principles for responsible investment. Maryland would not be alone in doing this: States such as North Carolina, Michigan, and Minnesota have already announced and begun the process of major divestment from Israeli bonds by their own state pension systems and treasurer's offices. This shows that other places are stepping up. Maryland has a duty to follow suit.

Another reason why I support this bill is because we cannot continue to support genocide. Theologically speaking, Jesus said "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the Children of God" We cannot have peace if we are investing state funds in war. We cannot have peace if the blood of children is constantly being spilled. We cannot have peace if people are being displaced. There is national call for this and we must do the right thing not because it's the political thing, not because it's convenient but because it is right.

Thank you for your time and please vote in favor

