

Monday, March 9, 2026

Dear Committee Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee,

I am a resident of Baltimore City and District 41. I am submitting testimony as a member of Sanctuary Maryland and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) Baltimore, a national grassroots Jewish organization in support of Palestinian rights with over 10,000 supporters in Maryland, as well as chapters in Baltimore, the DC Metro area, and at University of Maryland College Park. I am testifying in **strong support of HB1382, State Procurement - Prohibited Certifications - Boycotts of Foreign Countries.**

As Marylanders we strongly support this bill, which protects the crucial right to boycott, a key tactic in nonviolent campaigns against injustice. The bill protects this right by overturning an unlawful Executive Order (EO) signed by past Governor Larry Hogan that limits the ability to participate in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against the State of Israel for its ongoing perpetration of war crimes and genocide against Palestinians and the people of Gaza.

As Marylanders, we do not want to support the Israeli government's merciless and seemingly never-ending acts of war and genocide against the Palestinian people. The Israeli government has been actively carrying out genocidal violence against Palestinians for over two years, leading to **the deaths of over 72,000 Palestinians in Gaza since October 2023**, with independent estimates indicating the toll is significantly higher when including thousands missing under rubble. **Estimates indicate at least 20,000 of these deaths are children, with some reports estimating that over 40% of the fatalities in Gaza are children.**

Governor Hogan's EO willfully misstates the fundamental purpose and rationale for BDS, and the impact of the EO is actually to limit protected political speech. Specifically, the EO misrepresents the BDS movement by asserting that those participating in a boycott of Israel are engaging in antisemitic discrimination "because of [a person or entity's] Israeli national origin, or residence or incorporation in Israel and its territories."

In actuality, the stated aims of the BDS movement are to force change to the Israeli government's discriminatory policies toward Palestinians and its occupation of Palestinian land. As such, **the forms of political boycott promoted by the BDS movement should be considered protected speech based on the Supreme Court ruling stating that "boycotts to 'bring about political, social, and economic change' are a form of political speech."**

Attacks on freedom of speech are rapidly proliferating in America and have gotten significantly worse under President Trump's second administration. Anti-BDS laws and

policy such as Governor Hogan's EO have set yet another dangerous precedent for restricting free speech on other issues. For example, other bills have been introduced to prohibit shareholders from voting based on environmental, social, or governance criteria and to prevent governments from contracting with entities that "discriminate" against the firearm and ammunition industries or that boycott oil, gas, mining, or energy production companies.

Bills to put these restrictions in place in Maryland failed to pass the legislature, leading to Governor Hogan's Executive Order. **This indicates that these restrictions were clearly not the will of the people of Maryland, and our laws should reflect that.**

Many Jewish Marylanders, including many of the 10,000 Marylanders who are members of JVP, are committed to participating in the BDS movement. Regardless of one's views on the BDS movement, Maryland must not enable further attacks on protected political speech by allowing this EO to stand.

It is for all these reasons that I am encouraging you to **support HB1382, State Procurement - Prohibited Certifications - Boycotts of Foreign Countries.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dr. Katherine Blaha
Baltimore, MD 21209