

Testimony Prepared for the
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
on
House Bill 1382
March 9, 2026
Position: Favorable

I am grateful to the Chair and members of the Committee for this opportunity to testify in favor of House Bill 1382.

My name is Mark Brown. I am a retired pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). I worked for more than twenty years in the Middle East, mostly in Jerusalem serving as the Representative of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). In that role I oversaw the humanitarian work of the LWF, which includes a cancer hospital in East Jerusalem serving Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

I am deeply committed to the well-being of both Palestinians and Israelis and firmly believe that their futures are intimately linked. I have witnessed over a span of five decades how the peace, prosperity, safety, and security of one is profoundly intertwined with that of the other.

I have also witnessed the brutality of the Israeli occupation and the egregious human rights violations that take place every day as part of the government's efforts to maintain the occupation. I believe it is my protected, first amendment right to peacefully, non-violently speak against the Israeli violations, including the expansion of settlements, house demolitions, administrative detentions, and bombings of churches, hospitals, and other infrastructure needed to sustain life.

The purpose of this testimony is not to make the case regarding the Israeli government's abuses, but to express my concern that Executive Order 01.01.2017.25 of 2017, which remains in effect, infringes on my right to free speech which includes the right to boycott. In my experience, this Executive Order prompts confusion, even fear, among members of Lutheran congregations who choose as a congregation to protest Israel's actions through boycotts. The Executive Order should not apply to any company, but especially not to a congregation that receives funds from the State

of Maryland for a food pantry, for example, while also publicly boycotting products or companies related to Israel.

I would like to add my voice in support of HB 1382 and the testimonies of the ACLU, Jewish Voice for Peace and others seeking to protect the right to free speech, including the right to boycott.

The Rev. Mark B. Brown