

Proponent of SB 445

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Good afternoon, Chairman Wanggaard and esteemed Members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 445. My name is David Soffer, and I am here today representing the Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM), an American organization dedicated to fighting global antisemitism. I am proud to stand before you today to advocate for SB 445, a bill aimed at defining antisemitism by law, a step that has been taken by 37 individual states across the US and by our last three presidential administrations. I want to extend my gratitude to Senator Rob Hutton for championing this vital piece of legislation and for his strong leadership on this issue.

As a Jewish individual who has lived in various states across the country, I can personally attest to the persistent presence of antisemitism in my life. From my early years growing up in the Northeast, where I was harassed for wearing my skullcap, to my candidacy for the Kansas House in 2022, where I was told, “Go back to where your kind come from, Jews aren’t welcome here” antisemitism has unfortunately been a constant in my experience, and one that many Jewish people across the nation know all too well.

To underscore the severity of the situation, in 2025, CAM’s Antisemitism Research Center recorded over 6,300 antisemitic incidents for a second straight year. In total, ARC recorded 6,819 antisemitic incidents, an 8% rise from 2024, which had a staggering 107.7% increase from 2023. The ARC has also seen an over 200% increase in US college campus antisemitic incidents since October 7th. Combat Antisemitism Movement commissioned a survey that found that 3.5 million American Jews have personally encountered antisemitism since October 7th, including 380,000 Jewish children.

Since the October 7 attacks, there has been a disturbing surge in antisemitic activity across the United States, putting the safety of Jewish students and the broader Jewish community at risk. Our K-12 schools, as well as college and university campuses, have become increasingly hostile environments, with incidents including physical harassment, intimidation, and even violence. Jewish students and faculty have faced threats, bodily harm, and have been blocked from entering certain campus areas, contributing to an atmosphere of fear and division. Wisconsin is no stranger to this, as you will hear from proponent testimony.

So how do we combat antisemitism? The first step must be to define what it is you are seeking to combat. SB 445 uses the IHRA working definition for antisemitism and its illustrative examples. The IHRA definition is the most authoritative and recognized definition of antisemitism, endorsed by every major Jewish organization in America and has been adopted thus far by 37 U.S. states, by multiple Presidential Executive Orders, utilized non-controversially by the U.S. Department of State for more than a decade, as well enacted by 42 other countries, and over a thousand other institutions. The IHRA definition and its

examples are on a short list of policy items that Presidents Obama, Biden, and Trump all agree, utilizing it as a key tool in combatting antisemitism for each of these administrations.

The IHRA definition is a clear, concise, and vital resource to determine manifestations of antisemitism in all its forms. Critically, in the post-October 7 landscape of antisemitism in the U.S., the IHRA Definition's examples encompass traditional anti-Jewish hatred as well as Holocaust denial and outsized criticism of the State of Israel based on its Jewish foundations and character. State institutions should have clear guidance to investigate instances in which anti-Israel activity becomes unlawful and discriminatory to Jewish students on campus.

Let's also address what this bill doesn't do. SB 445 does not infringe on First Amendment rights. We know this because it has survived legal challenges in other states and because the explicit language of the bill clearly states, "Nothing in this section may be construed to diminish or infringe upon any right protected under the First Amendment to the U.S.

Constitution or to conflict with federal or state antidiscrimination laws."

The goal of the definition is to help identify when speech turns to antisemitic conduct, something the Supreme Court has long ruled is not protected speech. For instance, a student group in Wisconsin posted the following: "ANY organization or entity that supports Israel is not welcome at UWM. Any organization that has not separated itself from Israel will be treated accordingly as extremist criminals. Stay tuned." To then follow that with repeated harassment of students on campus and vandalism of Jewish buildings is a sign of antisemitic conduct of speech turned into unlawful action.

Further, the bill does not prevent criticism of Israel. The IHRA definition explicitly says as much. What it requires is that Israel be held to the same standard as every other country. Why is this important? An example of holding Israel to a double standard is when individuals or institutions criticize Israel for the Gaza war but remain silent about the Syrian conflict, which has been ongoing since 2011. An estimated 580,000 Syrians have lost their lives, and 13 million have been displaced since the beginning of the conflict. If you criticize Israel for civilian deaths during a war but say nothing about ethnic cleansing occurring in the same region, one must ask why Israel is being held to a different standard — a stance that can be considered antisemitic. Similarly, decrying Israel's actions in Gaza while ignoring the Islamic Republic of Iran's brutal, bloody crackdown on innocent Iranian citizens is another example of double standards at play.

In conclusion, SB 445 will make a difference in combating antisemitism. The bill will help identify what is and, importantly, what is not considered antisemitism, and provide state institutions with a guide to understand which actions should be treated as antisemitic-driven activity. The time has come to listen to the vast majority of the Jewish community that is asking you to solve this problem. Thank you.