

Testimony before General Government Budget Committee
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(Testimony in Support)

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of Bipartisan Legislation to Ensure Vendors Contracting with The State of Kansas Do Not Discriminate Against Israel.

My name is Rabbi Zalman Tiechtel and I am representing the Chabad Jewish Center at the University of Kansas. We serve as a resource for the KU Jewish community and have been at the forefront of Jewish life on campus here in Kansas.

I would like to share with you a story about Rebeka. Rebeka is a freshman at the University of Kansas who recently returned from a Birthright trip to Israel. Upon her return to college, Rebeka was excited to display her new-found Jewish pride along with her beautiful Hebrew necklace displaying her hebrew name Rivka. It was during the first week of this semester when she was accosted on campus by a fellow student who directed at her disparaging remarks about the State of Israel and about the Jewish people. You can well imagine how Rebeka - now Rivka – felt being treated in such a manner and in a public space.

This is the sad reality facing so many young Jewish men and women on college campuses across our country. According to a recent study by Brandeis University more than one-quarter of Jewish college students on campuses across the US have described feeling hostility and even verbal harassment by their peers towards Israel and the Jewish people.

Why is this happening? Where did we go wrong? When young Rebeka approaches me with tears in her eyes for being harassed for who she is, simply for displaying her Jewish name in Hebrew across her neck, this my friends is non acceptable. This is why I am here today to share with you how BDS legislation has been influencing anti-Jewish sentiments on college campuses.

When activists speak of BDS, they are saying one thing and mean another. The goal of the BDS movement is not to actually get entities to divest, but rather to mis-educate a generation of future leaders by misrepresenting facts. This is done by demonizing, delegitimizing, discriminating against and applying a double standard to the nation state of the Jewish people. It is quite simple. If there were such a thing as a BDS movement, if it sought to boycott, divest and sanction, it would be across the board to all countries in the world.

By targeting all these efforts towards Israel, while disregarding other countries that are the worst offenders of human rights, this is called a political-warfare campaign targeting the Jewish people. There is a word for when you target a specific group of people and it is called anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish.

We clearly see across college campus throughout the world that all BDS efforts on campus are followed by spikes in anti-Semitism. They create fear in the Jewish community by isolating it for boycott and the heightened distribution of anti-Israel materials that border on anti-Semitism if not crossing that line. Anti-Israel Groups on campus do not only take issue with Israel, but protest organizations who support it such as Chabad or Hillel. They create such a hostile environment that Jewish student leaders feel unable to host events pro-Israel events on campus out of fear for the safety of those attending. This may be the reason why over 200 University chancellors and presidents have made statements opposing BDS. They recognize that BDS is a serious threat because it is turning the political opinions of many student leaders against Israel, and deepening divides between Jews and other minority groups.

In preparation for my remarks today, I reached out my many colleagues who lead Chabad centers at 256 campuses worldwide, asking them what are their thoughts on the impact that BDS has been having on college campuses. Their responses were more powerful than words; it was a real kick in the gut. They simply sent me emails upon emails with images, videos and news reports about the heightened anti-Jewish sentiments expressed on their campuses. Each one ended with that same line: Zalman, do whatever you can to ensure that this doesn't happen in Kansas.

And that is why I am here today.

I am sure you all believe that a young Jewish woman should be allowed to wear her Hebrew necklace with pride, as she walks to classes on a Kansas campus. This is not the first time in history that minorities have been attacked, and time and time again we have seen the results of such hatred and bigotry.

Today more than ever, when we are seeking to create safe spaces for our sons and daughters, we need to do all we can to eliminate any possibility for further hatred and division. This is exactly what this bill is all about and with your support we can ensure that there will be no room for such darkness in the great state of Kansas. Thank you.