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December 6, 2016

The Honorable William Coley
Chair
Government Oversight and Reform Committee
Ohio Senate
1 Capitol Square, 1st Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: In Support of HB 476

Dear Senator Coley:

On behalf of the Cincinnati and Cleveland regional offices of American Jewish Committee (AJC), the 110 year old Global Jewish Advocacy organization, we write to urge you to vote in favor of Ohio HB 476. This important legislation, in part, prohibits a state agency from contracting with a company that is boycotting Israel.

This legislation sends a clear message in rejecting the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement, which seeks to demonize and delegitimize Israel. The goals of the BDS movement are antithetical to our Ohio values. They seek to isolate Israel – a pluralistic nation with deep cultural, familial, security, educational, scientific, and commercial bonds with our state – rather than recognize the profound mutual benefits of our engagement with it.

Economic boycotts of Israel place the entire responsibility for the impasse in the Middle East on Israel. In fact, the Palestinians have rejected at least four peace offers and have refused Prime Minister Netanyahu's offer to reopen negotiations. All boycotts accomplish is to further encourage the Palestinians in their intransigence and harm efforts which move peace efforts forward. Recognizing the one-sided and destructive nature of boycotts against Israel, the U.S. Government is officially opposed to such action.

AJC strongly differs with those who claim that this legislation runs afoul of our valued First Amendment rights of freedom of speech. The state of Ohio is not required by any provision of the U.S. Constitution to join in, support or reinforce the boycott of Israel.

The First Amendment does allow people and companies to boycott Israel, just as companies have a right to do business in Israel, oppose boycotts and refuse to do business with those who do. The state may not criminalize or otherwise regulate calls for boycotts.

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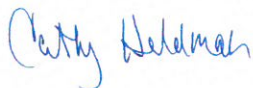
However, when acting in its plenary role as a purchaser of goods and services, the state may conclude that companies boycotting Israel will not make the best goods or services available at the best possible price. Moreover, the state may conclude that it does not want, even indirectly, to support boycott efforts directed at causing harm to a friend and ally of the United State and of the State of Ohio. The state has the same right as any market participant—as opposed to when it acts as a regulator—to leverage its economic clout to further its views.

At this critical time, in the face of the virulent movement to promote anti-Israel boycotts both in this country and around the globe, HB 476 is a positive step in condemning the BDS movement and affirming that Israel remains a vital U.S. ally and Ohio's economic partner.

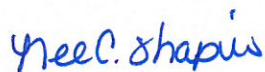
In another positive step, we are pleased Governor John Kasich has joined 33 of his colleagues in support of AJC's landmark bi-partisan "*Governors United Against BDS*" initiative in strongly rejecting BDS and reaffirming support for Israel as a vital U.S. ally, important economic partner and champion of freedom.

We thank you for considering our views on this important legislation and hope that you will support HB 476.

Respectfully,



Cathy Heldman
AJC Cincinnati



Lee C. Shapiro
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