

## **Testimony for Barry Guttman**

**April 26, 2016**

My name is Barry Guttman. I am a native of Cleveland and currently work as an attorney with Benesch Friedlander there. I am also the Vice Chair of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland's Young Leadership Division and an Israel Advocacy Fellow at the Federation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

For five reasons, I urge you to support HB 476, and take a stand against the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, or BDS.

One, despite claiming to seek a more just Middle East, BDS operates to undermine negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians toward a "two states for two peoples" solution to the Palestinian-Israeli dilemma. Bringing Israelis and Palestinians together to negotiate toward that two-state solution is the commonly accepted goal of the United States, the European Union and the United Nations. By contrast, BDS delegitimizes Israel's very existence in order to secure a one-state solution, which would entail nothing short of Israel's dissolution as a Jewish and democratic, multicultural state.

Two, though it may be difficult to imagine right now, peace in the Middle East is achievable. However, if we are to achieve that peace, then we must recognize that an enduring peace can only be realized after Israelis and Palestinians, along with international support, have worked toward the shared goal of a negotiated two-state solution. As with any negotiation, however tense, both sides must be brought to the table and may need to make difficult compromises or concessions. BDS focuses solely on pressuring Israel, thus stymying efforts to lay the groundwork for negotiations. Rather than improving the Israeli-Palestinian situation, BDS undermines the internationally-backed peace process that is premised on the development of mutual understanding and respect.

Three, despite being intended to hurt Israel, economic boycotts and divestment actions will ultimately hurt the Palestinians and the prospects for peace in the region. Recent history has shown that economic cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis has helped both peoples take steps toward creating an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation combined with economic development and political achievement. There are many positive opportunities to build the Palestinian economy and infrastructure, as well as encourage economic cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians. It is through these types of activities that we can help both Palestinians and Israelis live together, side-by-side. Those seeking to foster peace should support programs and efforts that promote reconciliation and coexistence, rather than tearing down either party. By that measure, BDS is not interested in peace.

Fourth, BDS is simply using its platform to tell an anti-Israel story that smacks of anti-Semitism. BDS's founders have expressed that BDS's actual goal is to undermine the very existence of the only Jewish state. Our State of Ohio has always taken a strong stand against discrimination and anti-Semitism. Voting for HB 476 will further demonstrate our State's opposition to anti-Semitism in all its forms.

Fifth, on top of everything else, BDS is also bad for Ohio's businesses. BDS will simply cause Israelis and their businesses to take their business elsewhere. Conversely, by denying state contracts to any business or entity that engages in BDS against Israel or Israelis, HB 476 will send a strong message to Israeli companies, researchers, academics, and businesses that Ohio is open for business.

As legislators, you have the opportunity to curb BDS's attempts to delegitimize Israel and, simultaneously, to help educate the public about BDS's true goals, both of which are in the best interests of not only Palestinians and Israelis, but also the State of Ohio. I strongly urge you to vote for HB 476. Thank you.