

Testimony of Benjamin Golsky
In Support of HB 476 (As Passed by House)
Ohio Senate | Committee on Government Oversight & Reform
December 6, 2016

Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Seitz, and Ranking Member Yuko – and sir, it’s good to see you back – and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ben Golsky, and I’m an attorney here today as a volunteer lay leader with the Jewish Federation of Cleveland. Cleveland is the largest Jewish community in the state, and if you include our sister communities across Northeast Ohio, we’re one of the larger and more active Jewish communities anywhere in the world.

I am a member of the Community Relations Committee, which has as part of its mission to connect Clevelanders across faiths and ethnicities, from diverse background, and different neighborhoods together in facing today’s challenges building a better tomorrow.

It’s in that vein I come before you today in support of HB 476, as passed by the House, and I ask that you vote the bill out positively today and send it for immediate consideration to the full Senate.

Most of our work focuses on Greater Cleveland and Ohio.

But Israel is always in our hearts, and on our minds.

There’s a pride in Israel’s achievements, we’re grateful for what she stands for, and we still worry about her future.

Clevelanders, even within our own community, are a diverse lot. We don’t agree on everything. And that includes Israel. As I’m sure many of you have experienced in the lead up to, and the follow up from, last month’s presidential elections, politics and policy can become a heated topic.

So too on Israel, and so too in Israel

There are left-wingers and right-wingers, moderates, centrists, populists, and more. We may disagree on the politics or the policy, on the strategy and on the tactics. But we all agree on this: Israel is a shining, moral beacon in a dangerous sea of despots and dictators.

And we have both much to learn from Israel as well as much to teach.

The sheer number of partnerships between Ohio and Israel is overwhelming. I’ll give you just a few.

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Urban farming – something that brings food to literal deserts in Israel could rewrite the entire game plan of how we help inner city food deserts get healthier, fresher produce.

Israel's pioneering work with PTSD patients after terrorist attacks or wartime injuries can help many right here in Ohio recover better.

And Israel's success in primary care access and leveraging it for healthier patients is worth studying.

Likewise, programs from here – supported by our local Jewish federation and community – help Israel.

In Beit She'an, our community funds a joint Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian ecological development program, building bridges and increasing commerce.

The world-renowned program that helps disadvantaged high school graduates to get ahead is the subject of a documentary film, Yes, Ms. Commander. It's also a program where Bellefaire JCB, the premier children's mental health agency in Ohio, and one our community's stars, is actively involved, training staff and helping create the amazing success stories.

And the Cleveland Clinic is partnering with Israel's leading health technologies startups to bring medicine truly into the 21st Century.

In fact, there are at least two missions from Northeast Ohio heading to Israel in the next few months: the sole goal is business development for our region.

Remember those diverse voices and opinions I had spoken about before. In our community here, and in Israel, they can't agree on much.

They agree on this: the path to peace is not by boycotts, but connections. Israel's most ardent doves and her hardest right activists agree: BDS is wrong, it is immoral, and it is dangerous.

They also agree that the best way to get everyone to the negotiating table is by getting them to see something worth negotiating for; a better today, a brighter tomorrow.

That's what our partnerships do there.

And they do them here in Ohio too, making a better today possible for millions of Ohioans, with the promise of a tomorrow brighter with opportunities for jobs,

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better access to cutting edge health care, and new technologies to make our lives easier.

That's what the Ohio-Israel trade partnership truly does.

It helps Ohio. It helps Israel.

It helps us get to a place where peace is possible.

BDS hurts Ohio. It hurts Israel. It hurts Israel's Arab neighbors.

And it pushes peace farther back.

On behalf of a very diverse community, I can tell you we agree on this one thing: pass this bill.

Thank you.

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