

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on State Affairs
For HB 2391

Compiled on: Wednesday, April 2, 2025 2:40 PM

Note: Comments received by the committee reflect only the view of the individual(s) submitting the comment, who retain sole responsibility for the content of the comment. Neither the committee nor the Texas House of Representatives takes a position on the views expressed in any comment. The committee compiles the comments received for informational purposes only and does not exercise any editorial control over comments.

Hearing Date: April 2, 2025 8:00 AM

Chris Donofrio

Self

The Woodlands, TX

I STRONGLY OPPOSE HB 2391.

The word antisemitism, and what it means is precious and far too valuable to be debased as it is in HB 2391.

The definition of antisemitism defined in Section 448.001 of the Government Code is well thought out, specific, and in line with the spirit of the International Holocaust Remembrance Initiative:

“”Antisemitism” means a certain perception of Jews that may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. The term includes rhetorical and physical acts of antisemitism directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals or their property or toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

HB 2391 tries to normalize a fallacious definition of antisemitism as a way to:

Invalidate our 1st Amendment rights to free speech, peaceful assembly, and petitioning the Government for a redress of grievances.

Remove our 4th Amendment right against illegal search and seizure.

Remove our 5th Amendment right to due process.

The principle of antisemitism becomes meaningless when it is the go-to assertion regarding protests or dissent against US government policies. Becoming just as meaningless when the core issue involves genocide, or war crimes, or human rights violations, or violations of territorial integrity by states such as Russia and Israel. The actions of these two countries have been similar, the results the same. Russia, rightly, is condemned for its actions and subsequent results. Israel, unrightly, has been excused for its actions and subsequent results since any objection is attacked as being antisemitic.

We must acknowledge that not liking, or disagreeing with the policies, actions taken, and results created by Israel are not antisemitic. In fact, actions such as protests, and vocal expressions of anger or frustration are protected under the First Amendment.

More importantly, we must recognize and never tolerate when our exercise of First Amendment rights motivates anyone to verbally harass, physically harm, or destroy the property of someone who they know, or believe to be, Jewish. This is antisemitism. This deserves appropriate punishment.

Unfortunately, punishment cannot happen until we agree to adhere to antisemitism’s definition given in Section 448.001, Government Code.

HB 2391 does not achieve this threshold.

HB 2391 renders meaningless the word antisemitism and everything it represents.

HB 2391 needs to die in Committee.

Respectfully, Chris J Donofrio

Saren Rubel

Self

Austin, TX

I am completely against this bill for the reason that this is a slippery slope in regards to limiting free speech and the vagueness of this bill will turn into an enforcement nightmare. The bill is also a direct violation of first amendment rights please kill this bill before it goes any further it poses a great threat to academic freedom

Karma Chavez, Professor

self

Austin, TX

I write in strong opposition to HB 2391. We all need to fight anti-semitism, but when defining it to include all criticism of the state of Israel, this becomes a distortion of what anti-semitism is and a violation of the first amendment. Critiquing Israel and Zionism are not anti-semitic. You do more harm to Jews than good by enshrining such distortions in law and punishing students who use their first amendment rights.

Alex Mitov

Self

Austin, TX

I'm Alex, a concerned Texan dedicated to free speech, combating antisemitism, and ensuring Jewish safety. I urge you to oppose HB 2391, which contradicts these values. I've met many kind and loving Jewish people, and I don't want their identities linked to Israel's government. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism was never meant to be legally binding, and codifying it would endanger Jewish students in Texas schools. For instance, the Associated Press reported that 15 humanitarian workers were killed by Israeli Occupation Forces in Gaza on March 23. Discussing such events could unfairly place Jewish students in a position to defend actions they didn't commit, risking accusations of supporting genocide or dual loyalty. If they remain silent, Jewish students might feel excluded or blamed if others are disciplined for antisemitism. If absent, they could still be unfairly implicated. Opposing these actions might lead to accusations of antisemitism or disciplinary actions against Jewish students by school officials concerned about funding and reputation. Jewish students often face labels like self-hating or disloyal, ostracizing them from their communities. This dynamic already exists, and HB 2391 would exacerbate it, contradicting the goal of fighting antisemitism. It could also lead parents to withdraw their children from schools, depriving them of funding, and deterring future parents like myself from raising kids in Texas. I don't want my children to grow up in an environment where free speech about Israel could alienate them from peers, distorting their view of Jewish people. To combat antisemitism, we must protect free speech to foster understanding and acceptance. Restricting speech legally won't stop it; it will drive it underground, where antisemitism can grow. I urge this committee to uphold free speech, fight antisemitism, and protect Jewish students by opposing HB 2391.

Daniel Selvaggio

Indivisible, Oxfam, Self

Temple, TX

Absolutely not. Enough of attacking our first amendment rights for the apartheid, genocidal state of Israel. Being against genocide and international human rights violations is not antisemitism. And I am sure attacks against Palestinian protesters would be covered if this bill passed, right?!? Considering Palestinians and also semitic, anyone advocating for Israeli genocide would be reprimanded under this bill, correct?

Or is it just to bow down to the genocidal, human rights violating Israel?!?!?

Rep. Capriglione, you should be ashamed of yourself.

Daniela Silva, Rev.

Self, policy coordinator

Austin, TX

I am opposed to this bill

Martin Logan

Self

Austin, TX

I find this bill to be the wrong approach to handling anti-dentist in this state. Jewish students and faculty engaging in open discussions about Israel could be unfairly disciplined, as the bill does not distinguish between political discourse and actual antisemitic hate speech. On top of that academic freedom is essential for addressing antisemitism effectively, and broad censorship does not help Jewish students feel safer on campus.

We need adequate education and compassion for people who have these beliefs, I have had multiple successful conversations with genuine anti-semites by just talking with them about their view points. By just banning the speech all together we would be emboldening people who hold genuine anti semitic beliefs by banning any and all discussions regarding this matter.

Travis Schenzel

Self

Temple, TX

This bill is a direct affront to our first amendment. Colleges and Universities work best when there is open debate amongst the students. Yes, some of their ideas will be bad. Yes, some will be just wrong. That is what they are there for. To learn. To explore. To discover. None of this is in line with a government who decides what speech is acceptable for the students to debating. These kind of bills hinder our already lagging national education, they do not help. Allow the students to make their own mistakes and have society help correct, not the government.

Eliza Beth

Self, Integral Care Social Worker

Austin, TX

My name is Eliza, I am a reform Jew whose religion is deeply important to my sense of self and my community, and I am also a UT alum. I am writing to express my opposition to Senate Bill 2391. I appreciate efforts to curb antisemitism in our country, but I am honestly terrified by the idea that we would directly link criticism of Israel with antisemitism and punish students accordingly. Political speech and dissent is a cornerstone of American society and is part of what keeps us all safe, Jews included. It is certainly extremely reasonable for students of any religion to express criticism of Israel or hold dissenting political views towards Israel, and in my opinion should absolutely not be equated 1:1 with antisemitism. It is clear that the definition will be used as such. Israel is a country, not some entity that represents "all Jews", and is a country currently receiving billions of dollars in US military aid; Americans are absolutely entitled to opinions about it. This bill absolutely threatens free speech and academic freedom, and I believe strongly in safeguarding students' right to free expression, particularly on sensitive political matters.

As you know, SB 2391 uses the IHRA definition of Antisemitism to determine what actions might be prohibited. Many Jewish and non-Jewish scholars, including Kenneth Stern who was the lead author of the definition, have condemned the repeated weaponization of this definition of Antisemitism to quell all political dissidence against Israel. Stern notes the definition was never intended to be used as a code for discipline, and that because it is vaguely written it leaves alarming room to be abused by those silencing any speech remotely critical of Israel. This bill will certainly have impacts on the ability of students to exercise free speech, and I cannot understand how one would claim it will not. Ideally, this bill will not leave committee; if it must, I would suggest that the Jerusalem Definition of Antisemitism or similar be used in place of the IHRA.

SB 2391 sets a dangerous precedent for censorship, and I urge you, as a Jew and as a US citizen committed to the protection of free speech, to oppose it.

Alycia Castillo, Associate Director of Policy
Texas Civil Rights Project
Austin, TX

My name is Alycia Castillo, Associate Director of Policy at Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP), a nonpartisan civil liberties organization dedicated to protecting Texans' rights.

TCRP opposes HB 2391 as it violates constitutional principles by requiring officials to consider speech content when making disciplinary decisions.

Justice Holmes emphasized in 1929 that the First Amendment protects not just agreeable speech but "freedom for the thought we hate." Nearly a century later, the Supreme Court affirmed this, proudly safeguarding unpopular speech. Justice Scalia, too, upheld free speech rights even for "reprehensible" views, underscoring our robust First Amendment tradition.

HB 2391 contravenes this tradition. First, it directs school administrators to evaluate whether student actions are "motivated by anti-semitism" using part of the code that references examples from the overly broad IHRA Definition. Administrators would thus impermissibly assess students' viewpoints when assigning discipline—a clear First Amendment violation. Justice Scalia explicitly stated that states cannot impose special prohibitions based on disfavored speech.

Second, the IHRA Definition itself imperils HB 2391 constitutionally. It labels statements like "claiming Israel is a racist endeavor" or comparing Israeli policies to Nazi actions as anti-semitic. Regardless of one's views on these opinions, the First Amendment equally protects them, just as it protects opposing viewpoints.

Third, HB 2391 undermines universities' core mission. Texas law recognizes universities' essential role in fostering free expression. The Supreme Court likewise emphasizes the university environment's importance in nurturing expansive freedoms of speech and debate. HB 2391 directly conflicts with this critical purpose.

Lastly, opposing HB 2391 safeguards speech rights across all political views. In recent decades, free speech protections defended pro-life advocates at UT Austin, speakers opposed to homosexuality at Texas Tech Law School, and religious student groups in New York schools. Curtailing speech for some inevitably endangers rights for all.

The constitutional remedy for disfavored speech is more speech, not censorship. Because HB 2391 mandates administrators to judge student speech content, TCRP strongly urges the Committee to oppose this bill.

Thank you.

Sadie Anomalous
Self service worker
Austin, TX

This bill allows for students to be penalized for utilizing their right to free speech.

Laura Gallier
Self retired cpa
Houston, TX

I oppose this bill. The law is already clear on this matter.

Tura Cook, Ms
self, retired public servant
Austin, TX

I am Jewish and know what it feels like to experience antisemitic comments and discrimination. I feel very strongly that Jewish students and all students in Texas schools should experience their education in an environment free of racism, discrimination and violence. But the IHRA definition of antisemitism is a poor determinant of racism against Jews. A classroom discussion about Palestine and Israel belongs in the schools and opinions expressed in criticism of apartheid and occupation or in support of Palestine human rights as protected by international law are not examples of antisemitism. I would rather see protections against bullying for all students - Jewish, Muslim, Palestinian, Arab origin, Asian, Native American, queer and trans, disabled - students of all demographic groups. I suggest that Representative Capriglione withdraw this bill and prepare an anti-bullying bill that serves all students for the next legislative session.

Kathy Turner
SELF
McGregor, TX
strongly support

Hearing Date: April 2, 2025 8:00 AM

Michael Belsick
Fredericksburg Tea Party
Fredericksburg, TX

I am FOR HB 2391 because we should all be against antisemitism!

George Gibson
self
Houston, TX

The definition of anti-Semitism was codified by previous legislatures (Govt Code 448.001) and needs to be established as the governing definition for educational institutions to use in their investigations of anti-Semitic conduct. Many in our society have attempted to warp the internationally understood meaning of anti-Semitism to support political views, violence, and Jew hatred. Texas needs to make sure that its definition is incorporated into our schools. Please pass HB 2391.

Karen Westall
Self- retired attorney2391
Katy, TX

I am writing in support of this bill. Antisemitism is not only rampant and escalating in schools, but it is the “canary in the coal mine” for other forms of hate. I strongly urge you to pass this bill.

Alfred Meyerson
Self
Austin, TX

I am in favor of this bill which is of the utmost importance.

Margaret Waisman
Self--Retired
Houston, TX

Please support this bill. Thank you.