

Testimony Presented to Members of the
House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees of the Virginia General Assembly
Science Museum of Virginia, Dewey Gottwald Center
By James Metz from Richmond, Virginia
On behalf of the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights
January 3, 2019



Paul Noursi – Co-chair
Nancy Wein – Co-chair

Participating Organizations

American Muslims for Palestine
Appalachian Peace Education Center
Arab American Association of Central Virginia
Community for Justice in Palestine & Israel of the Alliance of Baptists
Defenders for Freedom, Justice, and Equality
Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church - USA
Jewish Voice for Peace
National Arab American Women's Association
New Dominion PAC
Northern Virginians for Peace & Justice
Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace
Plowshares Peace & Justice Center
Richmonders for Peace in Israel and Palestine
Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East, Northern Virginia Chapter
United Methodists for Kairos Response
US Campaign for Palestinian Rights
Washington Interfaith Alliance for Middle East Peace

My name is *James Metz*. I am from Richmond, Virginia. I am speaking on behalf of the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights (VCHR), which is comprised of 17 organizations representing over 8,000 Virginians.

I am here to protest the allocation of \$ 215,184 in taxpayer money to fund the Virginia-Israel Advisory Board in 2019. While the dollar amount is insignificant compared to the total state budget, the Virginia-Israel Advisory Board represents an intrusion of a foreign state into the business of the Commonwealth that is huge and unprecedented. The Virginia-Israel Advisory Board is nothing less than a public relations operation for the state of Israel. It has no business being a state agency.

The Virginia-Israel Advisory Board is a liability to the Commonwealth of Virginia because it:

1. provides Israel unique access to, and the implicit endorsement by, the government of the Commonwealth of Virginia that no other country enjoys;
2. embroils the Commonwealth in a foreign policy debate on BDS, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. In 2016 the Virginia-Israel Advisory Board was named in House Bill 1282 to maintain a list of vendors supporting BDS. The ACLU and the VCHR prevailed in opposing this bill as a violation of a vendor's First Amendment rights;
3. operates independently of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the state agency with the responsibility to oversee and coordinate economic initiatives, including those involving foreign trade. In the 2018 General Assembly session, when the Senate Rules Committee proposed reorganizing the Israel Advisory Board under the Economic Development Partnership, the Israel Advisory Board hired a lobbying firm to steer passage of a House bill to prevent that from happening;

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4. conflicts with the Commonwealth's economic interests. In 2017 Virginia's trade deficit with Israel reached \$500 million.¹ When the VCHR conducted a poll² fielded by Google Surveys from September 22 to October 4, the results showed that of 2,110 Virginians surveyed, a plurality (38.1%) favor ending taxpayer funding for Israeli business ventures;
5. undermines U.S. foreign policy that seeks to pressure Israel to stop its settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem;
6. ignores Israel's human rights abuses, which have been condemned by the United Nations, and the International Court of Justice among others.

For the reasons cited, the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights recommends that the Virginia-Israel Advisory Board be defunded and dissolved.

¹ from data reported by the Office of Trade and Economic Analysis:

<http://tse.export.gov/TSE/TSEReports.aspx?DATA=SED&39.1183579&-77.211762&false>
<http://tse.export.gov/stateimports/TSIReports.aspx?DATA=SED>

² www.vchr.org/viab.html