



THE PENNSYLVANIA JEWISH COALITION



Pennsylvania Jewish Coalition Testimony on Divestment of State Funds from Terrorist Sponsored Countries

Hank Butler; Executive Director, Pennsylvania Jewish Coalition
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Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Pennsylvania Senate Finance Committee for allowing me to speak with you today.

My name is Hank Butler and I am the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Jewish Coalition (PJC). The PJC represents Jewish Federations and Communities throughout Pennsylvania is state government. The mission statement of the PJC is to “work individually and collectively with others, representing Pennsylvania’s Jewish communities before state government and with other Pennsylvanians. Jewish values guide the PJC’s focus on issues of importance to these communities, including public social policy and funding and regulations of the delivery of human services.”

I am testifying before you to discuss our support for the divestment of state funds from companies investing and operating in terrorist sponsored countries.

The PJC believes that Pennsylvania’s divestment is a strong step towards fighting genocide and terrorism. The PJC is advocating for the passage of legislation to require that funds of the Commonwealth, or funds invested by Commonwealth entities responsible for the administration of such funds, terminate all direct investments in

(1) ALL governments of countries that support or sponsor terrorism, including genocidal activities (as so identified on the U. S. State Department's list of state sponsors of international terrorism), so long as they remain on such list, and

(2) Companies engaged in business activities that assist these governments in their terrorist (including genocidal) activities rather than providing goods or services for solely humanitarian purposes. (Currently Iran, North Korea, Sudan Syria and Cuba comprise the states on this list.)

Why Support the Divestment from Companies investing and operating in Countries involved in genocidal activities? The PJC believes in the importance of the lessons learned from the atrocities of the Holocaust:

Never Forget!!

Never Again!!

Since 2003, hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed and millions more displaced from their homes in the Darfur region of the Sudan as supported by the National Congress Party-led faction of the Government of Sudan.

Pennsylvania, and the rest of the world, needs to send the message that genocidal activities will not be tolerated and asks for the divestment from companies who invest or operate in countries, such as the Sudan, who support genocide and/ or the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

Why Support the divestment from companies investing and operating in countries who support terrorist acts? The Jewish communities throughout the nation and the world rallied behind the importance of peace and an end to terrorism. These atrocious

acts of violence directly impacts the way we work, play, live and raise our families. Countries (as identified by the United States State Department) who support and help fund terrorism aid in the creation of an unsafe environment and hinders our homeland security. These identified countries (Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Syria, and Cuba) have a reputation of innocent killings, the development of nuclear weaponry, threatening destruction of democracy, and an end of peace and safety in our society.

It is time to stop letting terrorism control the lives of innocent families around the world and start taking back our safety and security. States such as California, Florida, Louisiana, and Missouri have already taken a stand against genocide and terrorism by divesting their state funds from specified companies investing and operating in terrorist sponsored countries. Pennsylvania needs to follow suit and send the message to the world that genocidal and terrorist activities will not be tolerated.

Opponents of divestment will bring forth concerns that divestment efforts will cause the depletion of revenue and that one state cannot make a difference. Let's look at each of these concerns separately:

Concern 1: Divestment forces the loss of revenue and profit for their stakeholders.

Divestment does not mean a loss of revenue or profit; it means reinvesting money away from companies investing and operating in terrorism supported countries to companies investing and operating safer, less volatile, anti-terrorist countries. The perceived loss is of investments is just that a perception – pessimistic, worst case scenario and can easily be diverted with careful and well prepared reinvesting.

Concern 2: Divestment from Pennsylvania cannot make a difference in the global arena? In the political world, we hear the continual “get out the vote” rallying cry that “one vote can makes a difference.” Similarly looking at divestment, “one state taking a stand can make a difference”. Pennsylvania needs to join states like California, Florida, Louisiana, and Missouri and send the message to our national and worldwide leaders that acts of genocide and terrorism will not be tolerated. The Commonwealth can make a difference and by joining the divestment efforts of other states, we can help increase the support for taking a stand, embracing divestment, and take our society/ our safety back ending terrorism and promote a world of peace.

Divestment is the loudest message you and our elected officials can make towards opposing acts of genocide and terrorism. It is louder than any resolution or citation. Divestment is Pennsylvania way to flex our muscle in the global arena to end the atrocities of genocide and terrorism while promoting and striving for a safer world to work, play, and raise our families.

Thank you again for the opportunity to convey our support for divestment of state funds from companies investing and operating in terrorist sponsored countries. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.