

MASSACHUSETTS



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# MASSACHUSETTS AFL-CIO

*Today's Unions*

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August 7, 2017

Chairwoman Jennifer Benson  
Joint Committee on State Administration  
& Regulatory Oversight  
State House Room 22  
Boston, MA 02133

Chairman Walter Timilty  
Joint Committee on State Administration  
& Regulatory Oversight  
State House Room 213-B  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairwoman Benson, Chairman Timilty, and Members of the Committee,

I write to you today to register support for *An Act Prohibiting Discrimination in State Contracts* (S.1689/H.1685) which prohibits the Commonwealth from entering into contracts with an individual or entity that refuses to do business with any other person or entity based upon their race, color, creed, religion, sex, national origin, gender identity or sexual orientation.

The basis for this anti-discrimination legislation, and other existing anti-discrimination laws, is to protect individuals from unfair treatment based upon inherent characteristics that they cannot change. It is important to note that this legislation does not prevent the Commonwealth from entering into contracts with businesses or individuals who engage in political boycotts due to a specific action or practice undertaken by a given person or entity. The Labor Movement has a long history of successfully using boycotts and other collective action to raise standards for workers by targeting companies that engage in unfair labor practices, and we believe the right to do so is essential in order to achieve important social and political ends. However, it is important to extend protections to individuals who stand to be harmed by boycotts due to who they are, not their actions.

Much of the testimony and public debate around this legislation has centered around ongoing boycotts against businesses and individuals native to the state of Israel. Recognizing that citizens across the globe and throughout Massachusetts care deeply about the conflict in Israel and the Palestinian territories, and wish to encourage a political resolution through economic pressure, we stand by the right to boycott an entity based on actions taken with respect to this conflict. However, as the only nation in the Middle East with a free trade union movement, with unions representing both Israeli and Palestinian members, any boycott that does not discern between actors in the conflict and businesses providing quality jobs for workers regardless of their national origin would only serve to harm innocent individuals to no political end.

I urge the Committee to report S.1689 & H.1685 favorably. Thank you for your consideration in these matters.

Sincerely,

Steven A. Tolman  
President