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OFFICE OF
**NEW YORK STATE
ASSEMBLYWOMAN
NILY ROZIC**
25th DISTRICT

DISTRICT OFFICE
159-16 Union Turnpike
Flushing, New York 11366
718-820-0241

CAPITAL OFFICE
Room 510
Albany, New York 12248
518-455-5172

EMAIL
rozicn@nyassembly.gov

Testimony of New York State Assemblywoman Nily Rozic

Before the New York City Council Committee on Contracts regarding the resolution 1058-a condemning all efforts to delegitimize the State of Israel and the global movement to boycott, divest from, and sanction the people of Israel.

September 8, 2016

Chair Helen K. Rosenthal and Members of the Committee:

My name is Nily Rozic and I represent the New York State Assembly 25th District. My district includes the communities of Flushing, Queensboro Hill, Hillcrest, Fresh Meadows, Auburndale, Oakland Gardens, Bayside Hills, and Douglaston. I am the first Israeli-born state legislator. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today.

It is my work and experience as a member of the State Assembly that compel me to urge your support of City Council Resolution 1058-a, that condemns all efforts to delegitimize the State of Israel and the global movement to boycott, divest from, and sanction the people of Israel.

I would like to personally thank our colleague, Council Member Andrew Cohen for introducing this resolution. Additionally, I would like to thank the many other members of the Council who have co-sponsored the resolution, and who have never hesitated to defend the City of New York from those who would do harm to our city or its people. I would also like to thank the distinguished Speaker of the City Council, Melissa Mark-Viverito for holding this hearing, and City Council Minority Leader Steven Matteo, for co-sponsoring the resolution and demonstrating once again that defending New York is not a partisan issue.

Many of us have passionate feelings about the issues in the Middle East. I, of course, do not hide my pride in the accomplishments of the State of Israel. At the same time, the constituents that I represent, and indeed the entire Jewish people, earnestly seek and pray for peace that will allow all in the region to live in safety, to fulfill their full potential, and above all else to achieve and sustain the democratic ideals we hold so dear.

I oppose the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement not just because it seeks to do harm to our brothers and sisters in Israel, but because it seeks to cut off the interactions, the dialogue, and the partnerships that lead to peace and security. It does not just want to block Israeli companies from conducting business in the United States, but also prevent Israeli academics from cooperating with American universities, and even stop Israeli artists from performing at American venues.

I urge your support of this resolution because of the damage that the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement can do to the State of New York, its people and its economy, and is already doing to the well-being of students on campuses throughout the city and state. New York has benefitted tremendously from the business and research opportunities that have been formed between New York and Israeli companies, research centers and entrepreneurs. We share innovation, breakthrough research, and entrepreneurship..

There are countless Israeli companies in New York and dozens of research and economic partnerships between our state and Israel. The Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement could destroy these partnerships, impact New York's economy and cost New Yorkers jobs. New York alone exported \$5.4 million in goods to Israel in 2015. We should be working to strengthen these ties and bolster economic growth. This resolution would help ensure New York companies can continue to partner and transform our state's economy.

The organizers of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement have also targeted colleges, including many campuses in the CUNY system. They do not seek to build partnerships for peace or dialogue, rather discouraging dialogue or outright prohibiting it. They seek to ban academic partnerships, on all subjects, both those that exist today and those that have not yet been imagined, that could one day transform the state and the world. This creates a hostile environment on campus, and fosters an environment in which anti-Semitism on campus has become all too real a problem. This wave of anti-Semitic rhetoric and anti-Israeli discriminatory activity across the state remains a significant concern.

I am proud to report that the State is gearing up to pass robust legislation that would outlaw state business with companies or individuals who are involved in Boycott Divestment and Sanction activity. It would ensure that companies and institutions that discriminate through BDS will be ineligible for state contracts. The bill passed the Senate in January of this year. In June, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed an executive order--the first of its kind in the United States--that orders state and executive-branch agencies to divest themselves of companies and organizations that support the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. Similar legislation has been passed or introduced in many other states, including Georgia, Florida, California, Illinois, and Indiana.

This joins pending bipartisan federal legislation, sponsored by Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) in the Senate, and Juan Vargas (D-CA) and Bob Dold (R-IL) in the House. The "Combating BDS Act of 2016," aims to protect state and local governments' right to withdraw their pension funds and contracts from entities that boycott, divest, or sanction Israel.

The Boycott Divestment and Sanction movement against Israel has no place in New York. Nothing would be better than to see the City of New York join the growing list of cities that reject this movement and stand for dialogue and collaboration.

I urge you to move this resolution forward and consider other opportunities to increase support. Your support will continue New York's national recognition as an economic engine, a leader in investment, collaboration, and innovation.

Thank you.