



**Middle
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of North America, Inc.

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February 6, 2014

Senator Joan Carter Conway
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West Wing
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401
via email: joan.carter.conway@senate.state.md.us

Dear Senator Conway:

I write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our grave concern about Maryland Senate Bill 647, which you introduced on January 31, 2014, and which would prohibit the use of state funds by colleges and universities to support faculty membership in, or travel to, the academic conferences of “an organization that has issued a public resolution or statement or taken an official action boycotting a country that has ratified a declaration of cooperation with the state or the country’s institutions of higher education.” Because this bill would, if enacted into law, impose political restrictions on the use of public funds by institutions of higher education in Maryland and by members of their faculties, we believe that it constitutes a very serious threat to academic freedom and to the autonomy and integrity of the state’s publicly-supported colleges and universities.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to defending academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

MESA’s Committee on Academic Freedom has repeatedly protested actions by governments in the Middle East and North Africa, including Iran, Israel, Turkey, several of the Arab states and the Palestinian Authority, that we regard as infringing or violating the academic freedom of faculty, students and institutions of higher education. It has also regularly criticized infringements of, and threats to, academic freedom by colleges, universities, government agencies, legislative bodies and other entities in the United States and Canada. All of the committee’s letters since 2001 can be found at

<http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/committees/academic-freedom/intervention/index.html>.

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MESA has not expressed a position on the resolutions adopted by the American Studies Association and several other academic organizations regarding relations with Israeli institutions of higher education. However, it is clear to us that whatever one's opinion of the campaign to boycott Israeli academic institutions or of the resolutions regarding that issue adopted by these academic organizations in this country, the principles of academic freedom protect the right of faculty to advocate for, as well as against, such boycotts.

We therefore believe that, if enacted, SB647 would violate the academic freedom of faculty at state-supported institutions of higher education in Maryland by hampering their ability to join certain academic organizations and by effectively making it impossible for faculty at those institutions to secure funds from their college or university to support their travel to meetings sponsored by such organizations. Faculty in Maryland should not be subjected to a political litmus test concerning their involvement in academic organizations, nor should they be subjected to discriminatory rules that deprive them of the funds they need to travel to academic meetings – an essential component of their professional lives as scholars and teachers.

We therefore call on you to withdraw SB647. We further call on you to reiterate your firm and unequivocal support for the principles of academic freedom, including the right of faculty to discuss and, if they so choose, advocate for a boycott of Israel academic institutions. Finally, we urge you to speak out consistently and vigorously against all threats to and violations of academic freedom, wherever they occur.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathan Brown', written in a cursive style.

Nathan Brown
President