

Testimony Presented to Members
of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees of the Virginia General Assembly
Virginia Western Community College
By Jim Best of 101 Shelor Road, SW, Meadows of Dan, 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 Jim Best from Floyd County. I'm from the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights—16 organizations representing more than 8,000 Virginians. I'm here to discuss taxpayer funding of the Virginia Israel Advisory Board (VIAB)—to the tune of over \$200,000. The VIAB is the only board promoting the interest of a foreign state in the government of Virginia. I feel that it's appropriate for this agency to operate privately in sponsoring artistic and social events as well as the economic interests of Israel. However, it is not appropriate for the Board to be funded as part of the Virginia government paid for by Virginia taxpayers.

The VIAB promotes **Elbit Systems and El-Far Electronic Systems**, two companies located in Fairfax, that produce technology for military surveillance systems installed around the Gaza Strip. The company's Viper System is installed along the Separation Wall, in military camps in the West Bank, in illegal settlements and in Israeli prisons where between 500 and 700 Palestinian children are incarcerated each year sometimes in solitary confinement as a part of "administrative detention" without charge. **Elbit Systems** is the main electronics provider for the Separation Wall. The company's drones are deployed by the Israeli military in many operations launched against Gaza and the West Bank.

As a Scout leader for 16 years and the grandfather of three teenage boys, I cannot conscience the cognitive dissonance knowing that my tax dollars are twice supporting companies that promote apartheid and the arming of teenage soldiers on one side of a razor wire fence with ammunition, teargas, surveillance and reconnaissance first with \$11 million a day in U.S. foreign aid to murder in cold blood their peers on the other side of the fence and injure thousands more.

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VIAB is primarily a publicity arm of Brand Israel to cover up this egregious, longest and bloodiest apartheid in modern history that Virginians are not only funding with taxes but also with office space in the Pocahontas building as an official part of our state government independent of regulation by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership—the state agency responsible for overseeing and coordinating economic initiatives.

Virginia already has a \$500 million trade deficit with Israel. Why should we taxpayers support an organization that undermines our state economy? VIAB says that it is creating jobs for Virginians, but, in the words of a former Commonwealth Secretary of Commerce and Trade: "the (VIAB) annual report is likely the most inflated without merit that I have seen in my decade here."

No matter what size the budgetary commitment to the VIAB, the concept is a devious and violent affront to the values I have sought to exemplify to my Scouts, to my grandsons and in my own behavior: A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, reverent.

Thank you.