

September 10, 2019

Dear Members of Congress,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our strong support for H. Res. 496, a resolution affirming that all Americans have a constitutional right to participate in boycotts in pursuit of civil and human rights at home and abroad.

The Supreme Court recognized that, under the First Amendment of the Constitution, “persons sharing common views banding together to achieve a common end is deeply embedded in the American political process” (NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware Co., 458 U.S. 886 (1982)). A long line of U.S. Supreme Court jurisprudence upholds expressive conduct and criticism of government as the very core of First Amendment-protected activity.

Boycotts have been central to dismantling systems of injustice both at home and abroad. In defense of this vital right to boycott for justice, H. Res. 496 outlines the long and proud history of boycott as a vehicle for social change in the U.S., from the Boston Tea Party to the Montgomery bus boycott and the United Farm Workers-led boycott of table grapes, to the contemporary boycott of North Carolina over anti-trans legislation. The resolution further reaffirms Americans’ right to boycott in protest of the unjust policies of foreign governments, from the boycott of South African goods in opposition to apartheid in the 1980s to boycotts related to Israel’s violations of Palestinian human rights today. Three federal courts have recently agreed that such boycotts are protected political expression.

This resolution’s affirmation of these rights comes at this critical moment in our history: in the midst of ongoing organized efforts to stifle political expression, including pending legislation in Congress and measures to repress boycotts for Palestinian rights on the books in 27 states. More than 100 state-level anti-protest bills have been introduced. These repressive measures come at the same time as prosecution of human rights defenders, from water protectors to those protesting Trump’s inauguration – all for exercising their First Amendment rights.

At a moment when freedom of speech, association, and assembly are coming under increasing attack across the board, affirming our right to boycott is more important than ever. We must stand strong against all attempts to suppress protected political speech. The need for this resolution has become ever more clear with the recent restrictions placed on two of your own colleagues to travel to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories due to their support for this time-honored and constitutionally protected right to boycott.

We call on you to support this important resolution by becoming a co-sponsor of H. Res. 496, thereby affirming the importance of the right to boycott for social change.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this urgent issue.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
Arab American Civic Council
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
Center for International Policy
Civil Liberties Defense Center
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
CREDO
Defending Rights & Dissent

Demand Progress
Democratic Socialists of America
EarthRights International
Freedom Forward
Freedom to Thrive
Friends of Sabeel North America
Greenpeace USA
If Not Now
Jewish Voice for Peace
Million Hoodies Movement for Justice
MPower Change
Muslim Justice League
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI)
National Lawyers Guild
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
Palestine Legal
Presbyterian Church USA
Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
Presente.org
Project South
Revolutionary Love Project
Society of Native Nations
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
The Red Nation
Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center
United We Dream
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
US Campaign for Palestinian Rights
Water Protector Legal Collective
Win Without War