

Submitted by Nora Mann, Precinct 20

Dear Members of Town Meeting:

I want to share with you my position on the proposed resolution in support of a ceasefire in Gaza. By way of context, I am active with Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now, I have served as a legal observer and as a marshal at many Gaza protests since November and several college encampments in the past few weeks. Like so many Jews and others, I grappled with my position following the horrific violence perpetrated by Hamas and in the context of the ongoing occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people by the state of Israel and the violence being perpetrated by Israel and the IDF in Gaza

I am concerned about the impact of a debate on the Resolution on our already fractured communities - within the town and beyond. Let me explain: I agree with the merits; I support and have been active in support of Gaza and for a full, lasting ceasefire and toward justice for Palestinians. On principle I do not think that the Arlington TM is the place to debate weighty and complicated matters of world and foreign policy that have no impact on actions taken in town.

In particular, I am concerned that discussion of the Resolution and its merits will only further inflame the hurt, disagreement, anger, and fear that pervades our community and many others. Now I understand that the singular intent of the proponents is not necessarily to secure a lasting ceasefire or even to persuade President Biden (or our elected officials in Washington) to change US policy. In my conversations with the proponents, I was told that a goal of putting forward this resolution is to jumpstart a community conversation around the issues which are causing so much pain and division. While I may agree that some kind of conversation is necessary, I feel strongly that it must happen in a space and with the facilitation necessary for people to feel and be safe and to feel and be heard. And that is not the Arlington Town Meeting.

I have tried, as I am sure many of you have and are continuing to do, to grapple with a safe, positive, way in which Arlington in general and TM might debate this. In terms of presenting the many sides to the issue (it isn't just a yea or nay thing)

- some folks will disagree with the language either because it doesn't reference Hamas' actions with specificity or doesn't describe Israel's actions as genocide....two vocal sides that are only a part of the argument;
- many Jewish folks in Arlington who argue against the Resolution are purporting to speak for "their community" which to be sure does not reflect me or many other Jews and especially not those who consider themselves anti-Zionist; and
- many folks who support the resolution for a variety of reasons appear unable to see how there can be well-meaning people who oppose it.

For example, if/when I vote no action it will NOT be because I don't believe in the value of people letting their elected officials in Washington know that we want more action toward peace, ceasefire, and justice for Palestine; and it will not be because I don't agree with the substance of the resolution as it currently reads, because I do. Rather it will be because TM is not the proper forum for such a heated conversation. In that situation, I will be supporting the resolution in substance but be against the process. But the folks who support the resolution won't know why I voted "no" ; they'll just assume that I'm one more voice "against" their cause.

So I ask, how will the debate at TM do anything other than inflame and exacerbate tensions, anger, and hurt. The structure for conversations like this is, as you all likely know, complicated and the process must be facilitated expertly and over a period of time in which there is more than ample opportunity for voices to be heard. Much as I think TM is a great way to run a town, as a structure in which a majority will purport to speak for the whole community it is counterintuitive to place before it an issue like this.

I do not have a solution to this quandary. I ask only that as people vote in what is really a false binary, we afford every person the grace to believe that their vote is in good conscience and is NOT for or against a ceasefire, for or against death and trauma but is informed, as all our votes must be, by our own lived experience.

With greatest respect to each of you and for the meeting.

Nora Mann
Pct 20