

Submitted by Nancy Bloom, TMM Precinct 18

Dear Town Meeting Members,

My name is Avi Bukiet, and I am a resident of Arlington as well as the Rabbi for the Center for Jewish Life (CJL) on Lake St. I am writing to you today on behalf of the Jewish community at CJL, with over 150 families located across all precincts of Arlington, to express our opposition to warrant article 5 to be voted upon during your May 8th Special Town Meeting. Since October our community has dealt with tremendous pain and suffering from both having members of our community who were directly impacted by the October 7th terrorist attack by Hamas and the subsequent surge in anti semitic hate incidents in our Town. This pain has unfortunately been amplified by the process of this warrant article being brought to a vote, and I wanted to address you directly to explain why we feel you should oppose this article on May 8th and to take a similar position to the Select Board.

**One of the primary concerns we have with the proposed warrant is that it creates a dangerous precedent for future town meetings while at the same time serves only as a political statement with no legal merit to achieve its proposed outcome.** As you are I am sure aware, Arlington as a town is not a party to or a negotiating partner in any foreign conflict, including the conflict in Israel and Gaza. Calling for a ceasefire has no impact on the conflict in Israel/Gaza and even with the best intentions, neither the government of Israel nor the Hamas leaders will notice or act upon a proclamation issued by Arlington.

However, what this proposed warrant does is create a dangerous precedent for Town Meeting, where more and more time would be dedicated to discuss foreign conflicts instead of issues directly impacting our Town. The proponents of the warrant have attempted to make the case that this is relevant to Arlington because our tax dollars and US weapons are used in this conflict. However, as you are likely aware Arlington tax dollars are not used to aid any foreign country; the proponents are in fact referring to federal tax dollars paid by Arlington residents. The US provides weapons to over 100 countries and is currently financially supporting conflicts in Ukraine and Yemen as an example. We, as most Arlington residents, want to see an end to all conflicts in the world but I do not believe that the Town of Arlington is capable of doing so nor do I believe that this is the priority of the Town to dedicate time and resources on foreign conflicts.

**Second, we are deeply concerned about the bias and imbalance in the statement and the expertise of Town Meeting Members to validate the detailed nuances, inconsistencies and inaccuracies.** Proponents of the warrant have tried to argue that the proposed language does not appear to take a position on either side of the conflict, but that simply isn't the case.

For example, the warrant article includes specific casualty figures and figures regarding the amount of displaced people in the conflict. In the fog of war, even experts who have spent their professional careers studying the Middle East conflict, have dramatically changed their estimates as more data is verified and reported. Just this month the UN announced that it is investigating UNRWA, its relief and works agency for Palestine, for their complicity in the terrorist attacks associated with this conflict. Some of these figures in the warrant article come directly from UNRWA and Hamas-led ministry of health, with Hamas being a recognized terrorist organization by the US and dozens of countries in the world.

Simply put, how are Town Meeting Members expected to verify and approve such figures and statements for this conflict and any future foreign conflicts that will be brought to the meeting if this proclamation is to be passed? The Select Board had very similar concerns noting specifically that they are not experts on this topic and as such can not provide guidance.

**Finally, we would like to address the vitriolic discourse and divisiveness the proposed warrant article has brought to our community.** The Town Meeting vote on this article is the last step of a long and painful process that has seen hundreds of residents testify before the Arlington Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and the Select Board. The testimony has been emotionally charged and has created a rift in the community due to its polarizing nature. While many speakers attempted to passionately argue their views, some of these sessions featured blatant examples of hate speech. In their official report to the Select Board, the AHRC noted just some of the discourse that had occurred.

What you will also find is that throughout these listening sessions, there were dozens of people providing concrete examples of the rise of hate incidents in our Town since the October 7th Hamas attacks. Unfortunately, many of these incidents have not been addressed and this proposed warrant has only exacerbated emotions and divisiveness. If passed, we are deeply concerned that we will see the same types of tragic events we are all witnessing in our daily news across the country where the 'ceasefire' protests have turned violent and hateful.

It is unfortunate that we have reached this boiling point. We urge you to oppose the warrant as a first step to bring back peace into our Town, to seek remedy to the rising hate and refocus our efforts on making Arlington a model of coexistence and acceptance.

We believe the Town Meeting is designed to work on improving Arlington for all its residents and this proposed warrant can only serve as a political message supported by some and passionately opposed by others. Voting no does not mean we as residents do not seek peace, it means we respect the nuance of a complex foreign conflict and are focused on an agenda that promotes equality, education, and quality of life right here in our Town.

With respect,

Rabbi Avi Bukiet and the Center for Jewish Life of Arlington Community.