

Press Release:

## **Vermont House Ethics Panel Ruling Guts Ethics Statute: “A License to Buy Legislation”**

Liz Blum and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) condemned the recent House Ethics Panel decision (attached) allowing Vermont House members to accept Israeli-government-funded trips to Israel for House members that include lobbying. The ruling, they charge, nullifies the core purpose of [Vermont’s Ethics Statute](#).

“All a lobbyist for Israel has to do is omit mentioning that lobbying will happen as part of the coming trip—and the Panel calls that acceptable,” said Blum.

The Panel’s “Notice of Complaint Closure” reasoned that because the requests for state legislation came from Israel’s Foreign Affairs Minister after the legislators had already arrived, the trip could not “retroactively” become unethical.

The fatal flaw in the Panel’s logic, Blum and JVP argue, is willful blindness to the fact that the lobbying for legislation that the Vermont legislators received as part of the junket was foreseeable. Blum and JVP had submitted evidence to the Panel that Israel has a long, documented record of securing anti-boycott legislation through lobbying by its supporters. By 2019, 27 states had passed such laws; today, 37 states have anti-boycott measures.

“Under these facts, direct lobbying during the trip was not a surprise—it was the pattern,” Blum and JVP told the Panel. “The legislators had every opportunity, with reasonable care, to know what they were walking into by accepting the lavish gifts from lobbyists. That was unethical.”

The Panel ignored those facts entirely, Blum and JVP say, and its written decision creates a dangerous loophole: Any foreign government or interest can now ply U.S. legislators with travel gifts, so long as they don’t explicitly promise lobbying in the invitation to the trip itself. The statute’s twin purposes—preventing the purchase of legislation with gifts, and preventing even the appearance of such a violation—are thus shredded.

The Panel did not mention The Valley News, a mainstream news outlet, whose [editorial](#) sharply criticized the trip as a quid pro quo. Nor did the Panel mention any of the facts and arguments we presented in our reply to the legislators’ response, attached.

“This House Ethics Panel decision is shameful,” said Blum. “It grants no credit to the five House members who took the improper gifts, and it discredits the Ethics Panel itself. The Panel turned a statutory safeguard into a roadmap for abuse.”

Blum had submitted the Complaint on behalf of herself and Jewish Voice for Peace Vermont-New Hampshire Chapter regarding the five Vermont House members who took the free trip to Israel on December 30.