

Texas City Tells People No Hurricane Harvey Aid Unless They Promise Not to Boycott Israel

By [American Civil Liberties Union](#)

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The city of Dickinson, Texas, is requiring applicants for Hurricane Harvey rebuilding funds to certify in writing that they will not take part in a boycott of Israel. The American Civil Liberties Union criticized the city's condition as a violation of free speech rights.

“The First Amendment protects Americans’ right to boycott, and the government cannot condition hurricane relief or any other public benefit on a commitment to refrain from protected political expression,” said ACLU of Texas **Legal Director Andre Segura**. “Dickinson’s requirement is an egregious violation of the First Amendment, reminiscent of McCarthy-era loyalty oaths requiring Americans to disavow membership in the Communist party and other forms of ‘subversive’ activity.”

The city’s website [says](#) that it is accepting applications from individuals and businesses for grants from money donated for hurricane relief. The [application](#) says that by signing it, “the Applicant verifies that the Applicant:

- (1) does not boycott Israel; and
- (2) will not boycott Israel during the term of this Agreement.”

The city appears to be enforcing a recently passed Texas law that requires all state contractors to certify that they are not participating in boycotts of Israel. While the ACLU does not take a position on boycotts of foreign countries, the organization has long supported the right to participate in political boycotts and has [voiced opposition](#) to laws and bills that infringe on the right to boycott.

The Supreme Court ruled decades ago that political boycotts [are protected](#) by the First Amendment, and other decisions have established that the government may not require individuals to sign a certification regarding their political expression in order to obtain employment, contracts, or other benefits.

On October 11, the ACLU filed a [federal lawsuit](#) challenging a Kansas law on behalf of a high school math teacher who is being required by the state to sign to certify that she won’t boycott Israel if she wants to take part in a teacher training program.

In July, the ACLU sent a letter to members of Congress [opposing](#) a bill that would make it a felony to support certain boycotts of companies doing business in Israel and its settlements

in the occupied Palestinian territories. As a result, Senate sponsors of the bill are considering changes.

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