

## Medford Council Divests Over Human Rights Concerns

August 8, 2025

— Categories: Human Rights



[Download IPFS](#)

Medford, MA. The Medford City Council has voted to divest municipal funds from companies linked to alleged human rights abuses, joining a growing number of U.S. cities taking similar steps in how public money is invested.

On Tuesday, the council passed the “Values-Aligned Local Investments Ordinance,” which calls for the redirection of city funds away from businesses tied to weapons manufacturing,

fossil fuel extraction, private prisons, and other industries that council members believe contribute to global human rights violations.

The vote passed with five council members in favor, one opposed, and one abstaining.

Council President Isaac Bears, who introduced the ordinance, said the goal is to align city investments with community values. “If we have these public funds, we are not going to invest them in this global effort that disregards and dehumanizes people in so many different ways, whether that’s for political gain or private profit, or in many cases both,” Bears stated during the public meeting.

The ordinance sets financial parameters for divestment estimated between \$10 million and \$40 million. Although it does not single out specific countries or conflicts, it includes language that prohibits investment in entities associated with what it describes as violations, including apartheid, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and illegal occupation.

While some advocates have linked the ordinance to the ongoing war in Gaza, the policy itself does not explicitly name Israel or the current conflict. Instead, Bears noted that the legislation was designed to apply broadly to any situation where public funds could be tied to global abuses. “There are very clear human rights violations happening in Gaza, Ukraine, Congo, Sudan, Myanmar, and other places,” he said in an interview with local outlet WBUR.

Vice President of the City Council, Kit Collins, also voiced strong support for the measure, linking it to her values. “This policy is foundationally aligned with my Jewish faith and with the imperative to repair the world,” she said, according to reporting from Patch. Collins acknowledged that her views might differ from others within her community but affirmed her commitment to ethical governance.

The ordinance also includes prohibitions against investing in companies that derive more than 15% of their revenues from the operation or servicing of prisons, jails, or detention centers, as well as companies involved in the extraction, distribution, or sale of fossil fuels.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a U.S.-based civil rights organization, welcomed the council’s action. In a statement, CAIR said, “We applaud the leadership and moral courage of the Medford City Council in choosing to divest from companies profiting from crimes against humanity.” The group added that it sees a growing awareness nationwide around how taxpayer dollars are allocated.

Medford is now the third U.S. city to pass a policy explicitly divesting from companies over human rights concerns. Dearborn, Michigan, approved a similar resolution in October 2024, and Portland, Maine, followed suit in September of the same year.

Dearborn's measure focused on ending investments in companies supplying military equipment to nations engaged in controversial conflicts. Portland's ordinance also prohibited city investments in weapons manufacturers and related industries.

These moves have drawn both praise and scrutiny from federal authorities. Last week, the Department of Homeland Security responded to national discussions by stating it would enforce all anti-discrimination laws, specifically citing the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which it described as being grounded in antisemitism.

While the Trump administration had initially proposed withholding federal emergency funds from jurisdictions that boycott or divest from certain companies, it later removed the clause from FEMA guidelines following public backlash.

BDS, a Palestinian-led campaign that calls for economic pressure on Israel to comply with international law, remains a politically sensitive issue in the U.S. The Medford ordinance does not reference BDS, nor does it endorse the movement, but it has been interpreted by some as part of a wider trend of municipalities making investment decisions based on human rights concerns.

Medford, a city of nearly 60,000 residents and home to parts of Tufts University, becomes a focal point in the debate over how local governments should wield their financial influence. The ordinance reflects an emerging view that cities can and should ensure their investments reflect community values and ethical standards.

Council President Bears said the city would monitor the results of the policy and adjust its investment strategies accordingly. "This is not a symbolic vote," he told attendees. "It's a practical step toward ensuring that our city's financial actions reflect its commitments."

The ordinance goes into effect immediately, with city officials expected to begin reviewing and adjusting municipal portfolios in the coming weeks.