

TESTIMONY REGARDING HOUSE BILL 748: UNFAVORABLE

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There is no question that the statute establishing Maryland's Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention needs to be corrected and improved. The basic problem is that as currently worded, the Attorney General believes that he lacks the authority to remove a Commission member, regardless of the need and appropriateness of doing so. This has led to the absurd situation that today, the Commission includes an organization (the Council on American-Islamic Relations) and an individual (Zainab Chaudry) who -- since October 7 -- have expressed noxious views which are inconsistent with the Commission's very purpose.

In the immediate aftermath of the October 7 massacre, Ms. Chaudry, posted the following comments on Facebook:

On October 17, Ms. Chaudry wrote, "[T]hat moment when you become what you hated most," accompanied by photos of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin lit up with the Israeli flag in solidarity with Israel following the Hamas massacre of October 7, and a photo of the Gate in 1936 decorated with the Nazi flag.

On October 26, Ms. Chaudry wrote, "I will never be able to understand how the world summoned up rage for 40 fake Israeli babies while completely turning a blind eye to 3,000 real Palestinian babies."

On November 6, Ms. Chaudry suggested that the mere existence of Israel was the cause of the current conflict, calling Israel an "inconvenient fact," and including an image of the words "it all started in 1948," the year Israel was founded.

When reached for comment about these remarks, Ms. Chaudry told Fox News that she condemns Israel's "racist government" for "genocidal war crimes" and for making "genocidal threats towards the Palestinian people and killing over 13,000 Palestinians in Gaza, most of them women and children murdered in their homes."

Ms. Chaudry's comments mirror the views of CAIR. This past December, the White House disavowed the organization after its national executive director, Nihad Awad, declared that he "was happy to see" Palestinians break

out of Gaza on Oct. 7, the day of the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel that killed an estimated 1,200 people and led to the seizure of 240 others as hostages, and that Palestinians in Gaza “have the right to self-defense” but that Israel “as an occupying power” does not. The troubling history of CAIR is well documented; as noted by the ADL, “While ostensibly focused on responding to the proliferation of anti-Muslim incidents and sentiment nationwide, key CAIR leaders often traffic in antisemitic and anti-Zionist rhetoric. In fact, some of its leaders have cultivated suspicion among the public toward a wide array of American Jewish institutions.” (<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/council-american-islamic-relations-cair>).

While Ms. Chaudry has every right to express her noxious opinions, the vitriol against Israel disqualifies her from serving on a Commission whose purpose is to "communicate and promote understanding of diverse perspectives in a positive and meaningful way." The presence of Ms. Chaudry on the Commission makes a mockery of the Commission's lofty goals, and is an insult to Maryland's Jewish community, and to all people of good will. Nevertheless, because Attorney General Brown claimed that he lacked statutory authority to remove Ms. Chaudry, she remains on the Commission to this day.

To resolve this situation, legislation is required which removes CAIR from the Commission, and which confers the AG the authority to remove individual Commission members for good cause. HB748 does neither. It maintains CAIR on the Commission, and establishes a cumbersome process for disciplining and/or removing bad actors based upon violations of a code of conduct which would not retrospectively apply to the comments made by Ms. Chaudry.

Instead of HB748, I urge the General Assembly to enact legislation which (like HB763) removes CAIR from the Commission, and which (like HB809) confers upon the AG the discretion to remove members for good cause.