

HOUSE BILL 748 – UNFAVORABLE

My name is Nasima Ali, and I am a longtime resident of Maryland. I grew up in Montgomery County, attending Pleasant View ES, Julius West MS, and Richard Montgomery HS (the IB Program). I established a Muslim students' organization at UMCP, and when returning to the area years later, I started to work with Muslim nonprofits in education and refugee resettlement, which is what I do until today.

I urge an unfavorable report on HB0748 for three reasons:

1. It is personal against one commissioner
2. We already have codes of conduct, redundantly, in our state
 - a. This wastes money
 - b. This also wastes time
3. Future commissioners would be jeopardized when exercising their right to free speech

To expound on my first point, the timing of this legislation is very suspect. It was introduced in response to the personal conduct of CAIR Director Zainab Chaudry. Therefore, this legislation is more of a witch hunt than a response to an actual need. I can and do testify below, to Ms. Chaudry's character, which does not meet the criteria of violating that state's code of conduct, which is already set forth in our state's legislation.

Since we already have the Maryland Code Annotated, General Provisions Article, Title 5 and Code of Maryland Regulations ("COMAR"), we do not need to spend thousands of additional dollars on adding more regulations. This proposed bill is not only dangerous to free speech, but also potentially wasteful. We need that money and time to be better spent on issues of concern to Marylanders.

Thirdly, every member of that commission has the right to free speech, as guaranteed by the Constitution. Ms. Chaudry should not be made an exception. It is very likely that every person on that commission has said and done things that would be construed as offensive by this proposed "code of conduct". The fact of the matter is that everyone has their own politics, and our political views conflict. If the members of the coalition are able to put aside their support for

Republican vs Democrat (as an example of a political belief), then they should also be putting aside their difference in beliefs with regard to what a far and distant foreign government is doing. Just because Ms. Chaudry does not share the political views of certain representatives or officials or commissioners, does not mean that she or any future commissioner should be targeted.

So yes, I am also espousing an unfavorable position to this bill on behalf of Jewish members of the commission. They may have liked, commented, and exposed full and unwavering support for what the ICJ has considered a genocide. And yet I say that unfair legislation that creates a door for politically motivated dismissals from the hate crimes commission, which may be used against these Jewish members of the commission, is not the answer for the problem.

More about CAIR and its Director:

I've met so many active and determined Muslim American citizens here. Therefore, I can testify that Maryland does have a long standing Muslim community that has been happy to work alongside, and with our fellow Americans of other faiths and cultures. However, it is also true that we Muslims are represented by the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR). It is the most active advocacy organization in the Muslim community, here in Maryland. One may even argue it is our ONLY such institution. I testify that it would be unfair to change this legislation to read "Muslim Community" when every other faith community is represented by its organizations. We Muslims deserve to be represented by our organization as well.

I began to hear about the CAIR back in 1994. We had (still have) maybe three national organizations that represented the Muslim community, but none were advocacy organizations per se. Muslims could not turn to them for redress or even documentation of anti-Muslim actions. When CAIR came on the scene, our community was finally able to start documenting and working on Islamophobia in the workplace, anti-defamation, bullying in schools, and such.

Zainab Chaudry joined CAIR and garnered much recognition of her good work within the organization. She has been recognized by the White House, and by the Governor's office. She advises the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, is a graduate of the Maryland Public Policy

Conflict Resolution Fellows Program at the University Of Maryland Carey School Of Law, and advises Howard County Racial Equity Taskforce as well.

But most importantly, she conducts the important work of CAIR. When Afghan refugees were brought in a chaotic evacuation in August 2021, Zainab became involved, on an organizational and individual level. While she was transporting pregnant women and children in her own car, she was also collaborating in a Maryland-wide coalition of Muslim mosques and nonprofits, known as Maryland Afghan Refugee Crisis Committee (MDARCC). I facilitated this temporary coalition that worked together for 18 months, and as such, was witness to her dedication to the same values as the state Hate Crime Commission. She also worked amicably with Jewish and Christian partners in interfaith networks for the common cause of refugee resettlement.

When the understaffed overworked resettlement agencies placed refugees in vulnerable unsafe placements, and especially when we had children being bullied in schools in Baltimore and Prince George's County, Zainab as Director of CAIR was the only recourse for some alleviation. She worked in front of media cameras, and behind the scenes with public school, city, and county officials. Ms. Chaudry was able to intervene and get some redress of these hate crimes. I am sure that we all hoped that with the appointment of CAIR to the Hate Commission that we would be able to bring more peace and justice to a state where hate still lives and is active against the Muslim community, and all our brethren minorities.

I cannot think of a Muslim institution that is more representative and effective in civil rights and hate crimes, than CAIR and its Director Zainab Chaudry. She has demonstrated a high aptitude, and success, in her roles thus far. To remove CAIR and its Director in this manner would be an injustice to the Muslim community. I urge an unfavorable report.

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