



February 26, 2024

Honorable Chair Vanessa Atterbeary
House Ways & Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony FAVORABLE with AMENDMENTS for HB1386 Education - Employee Training and Holocaust Education Study - Requirements

Dear Chair Atterbeary and House Ways & Means Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify on HB1386 Education - Employee Training and Holocaust Education Study - Requirements. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

This bill aims to require 1) each county board of education and certain nonpublic schools to provide employee with annual trainings on the prevention of antisemitism and Islamophobia; 2) institutions of higher education to include specific training on the prevention of antisemitism and Islamophobia in required cultural diversity training; and 3) the State Department of Education to contract with a consultant to conduct an independent study and assessment of Holocaust education in middle and high school instruction in the State.

Especially amidst the current surge of hate bias targeting Jewish and Muslim communities, CAIR supports trainings on Islamophobia and antisemitism in our secondary and post-secondary educational institutions. However, as it stands, we oppose HB1386 unless it is significantly amended for the following reasons:

- The bill should specify which entities or individuals would be tasked with conducting the trainings, what credentials they would be required to have and the process by which they would be vetted and cleared.
- The bill should include trainings on other ethnic, racial and religious communities who are also impacted by hate bias, including Arab-Americans, African-Americans, Sikh Americans, and Asian Americans.
- The language is too broad and ambiguous. Unless the scope and content of the trainings are clearly defined, it risks violating constitutionally protected First Amendment free speech rights in a political climate where both educators and students are already facing unwarranted and egregious censorship and consequences in Maryland public schools simply based on their political viewpoints.
- We believe that offering trainings on the Holocaust is very important. However, we also believe that its worth offering trainings on other atrocities such as the Bosnian Genocide, Genocide of Native Americans, and the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.

While we respect and appreciate the impetus for this legislation, we're concerned that unless amended, this bill would exclude other marginalized communities, and it can have potentially harmful consequences. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

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