



February 11, 2021

Honorable Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB400 – Hate Crimes - False Statement to a Law Enforcement Officer

Dear Chair William C. Smith, Jr. and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill **400** entitled Hate Crimes - False Statement to a Law Enforcement Officer sponsored by Senator Jill Carter. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

In recent years, we have seen a significant uptick in the number of reports of racially motivated 911 calls across the nation that have gained national headlines. In April 2018, a 911 was placed to a Philadelphia area Starbucks because two African-American men did not order anything while waiting for a friend to show up. That May, a white Yale student used 911 to summon police on a Black Yale graduate student napping in the common room of her dorm. In the same month, a white woman dialed 911 to report a Black family holding a lakeside barbecue in Oakland, California. In May 2020, a white woman called the emergency number on an African-American man in Central Park who simply asked her to put her dog on a leash. And the list goes on.

These are only a few examples of recent, high profile national incidents, but my organization has also received concerns from community members here in Maryland who feel like their race or religion has been weaponized by individuals who harbor bias towards them. Some have changed their behavior or the way they dress or appear in public; one family has even moved out of their predominantly white neighborhood for fear of being targeted in this way.

The function of law enforcement agencies is to protect and serve. The 911 system was established by AT&T in 1968 after the FCC met with the corporation to explore a means to create a universal emergency number that could be rapidly implemented. Its designated purpose is to summon the police in case of an emergency, but too many people feel entitled to exploit this system to make the police complicit in their racial bias.

It's time for the Maryland General Assembly to take action to prevent these dangerous calls. Needless 911 calls in non-emergency situations are a waste of resources and tax dollars and endanger the lives especially of communities of color who are directly and disproportionately impacted by them. We support this bill because it sets the tone for accountability, and we believe it will help discourage such behavior in the future. Therefore, we respectfully urge a favorable report.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Zainab Chaudry, Pharm.D.
Director, CAIR Office in Maryland
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Email: zchaudry@cair.com
Phone: 410-971-6062