

February 17, 2022

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

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB515 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act

Dear Chair Vanessa Atterbeary and House Ways and Means Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB515 entitled Inclusive Athletic Attire Act. I also want to thank the representatives who have introduced and supported this legislation. As a child I played basketball for my middle school and highschool in Smithsburg, Maryland. I remember when I was 12 years old I was kicked out of my basketball game and had to give up my position simply because I was wearing a hijab (Muslim headcovering). It was one of the utmost dehumanizing experiences of my life and instilled within me a deep feeling of otherness and inferiority to my white counterparts. Justice Warren stated in the *unanimous* decision of the Supreme Court in the groundbreaking case of *Brown v. Board*, which ended formal segregation in public schools, "To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone." This statement is also true of barring religious minorities from participating in athletics. It reinforces a white supremacist hierarchy where religious minorities and students of color find themselves at the bottom and psychologically defeated.

It is past time that we pass legislation to ensure this type of Islamophobia and discrimination does not occur and send a clear message that it is not tolerated. So long as we do not pass legislation that protects our freedom of religion in athletics, organizers, referees, & other athletic participants will arbitrarily enforce rules to deny access to Muslim women and other individuals – We will effectively be allowing private citizens to enforce state sanctioned discrimination under the guise of arbitrary "safety" rules. Simultaneously, these rules will force young Muslim women to choose between practices of faith and playing sports they love jeopardizing *their* safety and making them incredibly vulnerable.

As someone who was raised in Hagerstown, Maryland, this was the message I received constantly through the discrimination I experienced in athletics, but also through the harassment I received on a daily basis where students would call me "terrorist," "raghead," "Osama's daughter," etc. with the knowledge of teachers. I felt unprotected by the school which led to violent internalized inferiority that I am still undoing to this day. The Maryland General Assembly's decision of whether or not to protect religious minorities is not only about the athletic space but also the general lack of care and lack of protection of religious minorities in educational institutions. If the Maryland General Assembly enables individuals to discriminate against religious minorities in athletics, they further enable teachers to look the other way when a student is being harassed or Islamophobic students to rip off students' hijabs in class. The decision to leave religious minorities vulnerable will enable white supremacists, Islamophobes,

anti-semites, and bigots. This Assembly's decision will ultimately contribute to the culture of tolerance of discrimination in our institutions and state.

If this legislative body refuses to pass legislation that protects an individual's right to practice their religion and be an athlete, this legislative body is sending a *clear* message. We do not care about you. I intend on having daughters god willing and raising them in Maryland- and when I do - if this body makes the wrong decision today - I will tell them what you said with your vote

That you do not care. But regardless of whether you will give us the equality that we rightfully deserve. We will demand it. And I will raise my daughters to demand it. Because we have *always* had the power. And now it is time for us to walk in it.

I respectfully urge your vote in favor of the Inclusive Attire Act. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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