



January 31, 2023

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 SB5 – **Hate Crimes – Civil Remedy**

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 5 Hate Crimes – Civil Remedy sponsored by Senator Benjamin Kramer. CAIR is America’s largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

Hate crimes in the United States impact a broad range of communities. They are a malignant outgrowth of prejudicial thoughts and beliefs which make our society less safe. Unlike other violent crimes, hate crimes are often motivated by ignorant, misguided beliefs about a group of people.

This bill authorizes a person who is the victim of a hate crime, as defined by state laws, to bring a civil action against the person or persons who perpetrated the act, and authorizes a court to award financial and other damages.

Part of the work that my organization does is focused on tracking and monitoring the prevalence of bigotry, prejudice and hate against American Muslim communities. According CAIR’s 2022 civil rights report, *Still Suspect: The Impact of Structural Islamophobia*, our organization received a total of 6,720 complaints nationwide in 2021 involving issues including discrimination, hate and bias incidents.¹

These complaints clearly indicate that discrimination and bias continue to have a substantial impact on American Muslims and further demonstrate that our communities continue to be viewed with hostility and suspicion.

Unfortunately, a vast percentage of such incidents go unreported, partly due to fear or mistrust of law enforcement agencies, cultural attitudes and other reasons. In fact, CAIR’s New York office published a report in 2022, *Feeling the Hate: Bias and Hate Crimes Experienced by Muslim New Yorkers*, which found that only four percent of those who experienced a hate crime reported it to law enforcement because they either “do not trust law enforcement” or “feel it is not productive to report to such agencies.”²

An increasing number of hate crimes reported to CAIR's Maryland office are targeting young people, including teens who wear hijab, or the Islamic headscarf, and are visibly Muslim.

Stronger hate crime laws will help deter hate/bias motivated incidents, signal that a society values religious pluralism and diversity and help promote trust within institutions and agencies tasked with public safety.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB5. 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

1. CAIR 2022 Civil Rights Report. *Still Suspect: The Impact of Structural Islamophobia*. <https://www.cair.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Still-Suspect-Report-2022.pdf>
2. CAIR-NY 2022 Report. *Feeling the Hate: Bias and Hate Crimes Experienced by Muslim New Yorkers*. <https://www.cair-ny.org/feeling-the-hate-full-report>