



March 9, 2023

Honorable Delegate Luke Clippinger
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building, Room 101
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1066 Hate Crimes - Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention - Establishment

Dear Chair Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1066 Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention introduced by Delegate Joe Vogel. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

This bill aims to formalize a Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention in the Office of the Attorney General that consists of representatives and advocates from a wide range of organizations and communities, particularly those who are directly impacted by hate and bias motivated incidents. The Commission would be charged with developing strategies to prevent and respond to hate crime activity, evaluating state laws and policies relating to hate crimes, providing policy recommendations to the State Department of Education to address hate crimes that occur in schools, and providing legislative recommendations to the Maryland General Assembly to address hate crimes in the state.

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.

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 particularly in schools, including teens who wear hijab, or the Islamic headscarf, and are visibly Muslim.

A state-funded commission on hate crime response and prevention under the Office of the Attorney General is valuable and necessary for several reasons:

1. Raising awareness: A commission on hate crimes prevention will help raise awareness of hate crimes and their impact on individuals and communities. It will help educate people about the types of hate crimes that exist and the harm they cause.
2. Prevention: The commission will help identify ways to prevent hate crimes before they occur. This can include programs and policies that promote diversity, tolerance, and understanding.
3. Response: When hate crimes do occur, the commission can help ensure that they are properly investigated and prosecuted. It can also help provide support for victims and their families.
4. Data collection: A commission on hate crimes prevention can help collect data on hate crimes, including the number, types, and locations of incidents. This data can be used to inform policies and programs aimed at preventing hate crimes.
5. Collaboration: The commission brings together experts and stakeholders from various fields, including law enforcement, civil rights organizations, and community leaders, to contribute to discussions, share their observations and perspectives, and collaborate on strategies for preventing hate crimes to make our state safer for all.

In summary, this bill will help raise awareness, prevent hate crimes, improve the response to hate incidents when they occur, collect data, and promote collaboration among experts and stakeholders. Passing HB1066 signals to your constituents that you are committed to developing a society that values religious pluralism and diversity and promotes trust within institutions and agencies tasked with public safety.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on HB1066. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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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>