



March 4, 2024

Honorable Chair Anne Healey  
House Rules & Executive Nominations Committee  
H-4 State House  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony FAVORABLE for HJ0008 Condemning Islamophobia, Anti-Palestinian Hate, and Antisemitism**

Dear Chair Healey and Members of the House Rules & Executive Nominations Committee:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong SUPPORT of House Joint Resolution HJ0008 Condemning Islamophobia, Anti-Palestinian Hate, and Antisemitism. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

This resolution condemns Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian hate, and antisemitism, encourages certain awareness initiatives; and commits to supporting certain legislation and policies to discourage this forms of hate.

In recent months, our state has seen an alarming surge of hate bias motivated violence and incidents targeting Christian and Muslim Palestinians and Muslim and Jewish communities. Between October 9 through December 2, 2023, CAIR's Maryland office recorded 223 hate bias incidents and requests for assistance targeting Maryland's Muslim community.<sup>1</sup>

As compared to September 2023, the months of October and November saw a four to five-fold increase in the number of reports of incidents and requests for assistance. Of the 109 complaints and requests processed between November 9 – December 2, approximately 32 percent were complaints or reports of hate bias incidents and Islamophobia in schools and colleges/universities, 13 percent were workplace related incidents and concerns, and 17 percent were reports of doxxing or online threats.

Censorship and First Amendment free speech rights have become a growing concern especially among students and educators in schools and employees in the workplace. In February, our office filed a lawsuit, supported by the ACLU of Maryland, against Montgomery County Public Schools over the unwarranted and unjustified suspension of three life-long educators who were punished and placed on leave without an opportunity for due process simply for expressing support for basic Palestinian human rights in their private email signature or on their personal social media.<sup>2,3</sup> Our office has recently also condemned antisemitic hate targeting Jewish communities.<sup>4</sup> Several mosques and other houses of worship have also been targeted recently in Maryland.

A sample of reports and alleged and substantiated complaints reported to CAIR in Maryland between October and November include the following:

**Montgomery County:**

- Bomb threat at a Silver Spring mosque forcing evacuation during Friday prayers
- Students heckled and harassed during a peaceful walkout in solidarity with basic Palestinian human rights
- Students forbidden from displaying the watermelon symbol, Palestinian flag or saying 'Free Palestine' on school property
- Verbal and physical assault of Muslim student called a "baby killer" by his classmates
- Muslim student singled out as a 'terrorist' in class by a teacher during a discussion on Israel and Palestine

**Washington County**

- Road rage involving an aggressive driver making obscene comments about 'Free Palestine' bumper sticker on a vehicle

**Baltimore City:**

- Anti-Palestinian hate graffiti discovered on private property
- Vandalism of an Arab-owned business
- Threats and slurs against community members attending a ceasefire demonstration
- Car window broken at an Arab American family's apartment building
- Violent online posts by a physician endorsing the genocide of Palestinians
- Hostile comments, work environment by a nursing supervisor

**Baltimore County:**

- Islamophobic posters displayed in a classroom
- Silencing, 'shaming' of Muslim, Arab students protesting hateful poster in classroom
- Anti-Palestine propaganda and rhetoric by a teacher
- Derogatory comments and bullying of a Muslim girl

**Prince Georges' County:**

- Hateful letter delivered to an Islamic organization
- Bullying and harassment of refugee students
- A group of students locked in a classroom and lights shut off while praying
- Student's hijab attempted to be forcibly removed

**Howard County:**

- Threatening emails sent to a Howard County mosque
- Students told by classmates "Palestine is dead", "all Muslims should die"
- A woman told by her employer that the keffiyeh is a "terrorist symbol"
- Racist remarks/attitude towards a Muslim family by a server at a diner

This resolution would affirm Maryland values of inclusivity and tolerance and promote awareness about the dangers of hate. It would play a crucial role in promoting equality, protecting human rights, fostering social cohesion, preventing violence, raising awareness, and establishing mechanisms to combat hate in all its forms. Therefore, we respectfully urge a favorable report on HJ0008.

Sincerely,

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1. [https://www.cair.com/press\\_releases/cair-releases-updated-number-of-complaints-bias-incidents-reported-against-maryland-muslims-arabs-in-past-8-weeks/](https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-releases-updated-number-of-complaints-bias-incidents-reported-against-maryland-muslims-arabs-in-past-8-weeks/)
2. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2024/02/16/cair-first-amendment-lawsuit-mcps/>
3. <https://www.aclu-md.org/en/press-releases/aclu-maryland-supports-cair-lawsuit-defending-free-speech-teachers-montgomery-county>
4. <https://www.wmar2news.com/local/swastikas-drawn-in-jewish-delegates-apartment-lobby-according-to-social-media-post>