

TESTIMONY REGARDING HB763: FAVORABLE

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People and groups who engage in hate speech should not serve on an anti-hate commission. However, as currently constituted, Maryland's Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention does not satisfy this most basic requirement.

As required by Maryland law, the Commission includes a representative of the Maryland office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). The designated representative is Zainab Chaudry, the director of CAIR's Maryland office. Both Ms. Chaudry and CAIR are defenders of the abhorrent massacre perpetrated by Hamas against Israeli men, women and children on October 7, 2023. Ms. Chaudry has characterized the events of October 7 as an "uprising" of "freedom fighters" against a Jewish State that she compared to Nazi Germany, and CAIR's national executive director, Nihad Awad, declared that he "was happy to see" Palestinians break out of Gaza on October 7, and proclaimed that "as an occupying power," Israel has no right of self-defense.

CAIR and Ms. Chaudry have every right to applaud terrorists who viciously murdered 1200 Israelis, and abducted over 200 men, women and children, many of whom are still in captivity. However, by doing so, they disqualified themselves from serving on a Commission whose very purpose is to "communicate and promote understanding of diverse perspectives in a positive and meaningful way." By revising the statute to exclude a mandatory representative of CAIR (as well as other ethnic-specific groups), HB763 empowers the AG to remove Ms. Chaudry, and (if he so chooses) to replace her with a representative of the Islamic community who does not engage in hate speech.

Ignoring and seemingly indifferent to the noxiousness of CAIR's support of the worst attack on Jews since the Holocaust, opponents of HB763 -- which include local representatives of the ACLU, the NAACP, and Jewish Voices for Peace -- testified before the House Judiciary Committee that the bill was a vicious smear campaign designed to quash Palestinian voices and to undermine democratic values. None of these criticisms of HB763 are justified.

First, far from being a "smear campaign," the comments of Ms. Chaudry and

Mr. Awad that form the basis for HB763 are a matter of record. The White House issued a statement condemning Mr. Awad's "shocking, anti-Semitic statements in the strongest terms." Ms. Chaudry has never denied her comments, and at last week's hearing, she was specifically asked whether she retracted her comments, but declined to do so.

Second, the aim of HB763 is not to "quash" Palestinian voices; it is remove hateful and inflammatory voices. CAIR should be removed from the Commission not because of its position regarding Israel, Palestinians, settlements, or the current war in Gaza, but rather because of its approval of the murder of Jews.

Finally, what will undermine democracy is not the passage of HB763, but the gross and outrageous lack of civility displayed by the comments of CAIR and Ms. Chaudry justifying the murder of innocent civilians by a terrorist organization whose charter calls for the destruction of Israel. In an era in which debased and vulgar discourse is the norm, it should not be tolerated from members of any public body, much less from members of a hate crimes commission.

Maryland's Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention has important work to do. Over the past year, and particularly since October 7, reported hate incidents against both Jews and Muslims have spiked, both in Maryland and across the country. However, the Commission lacks the credibility and the moral authority to address this issue if it is comprised of organizations and individuals who are themselves part of the problem.

No less than arsonists running a fire department, it is absurd and self-defeating for dispensers of hate to serve on a commission to combat hate. By removing CAIR, HB763 is an essential step towards restoring the credibility and moral authority of a Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention which today sorely lacks it.