

February 20, 2024

Honorable Chair Luke Clippinger
House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony to OPPOSE HB 0763 Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention -
Membership - Alterations

Dear Chair Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee Members:

I thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong opposition of House Bill 763 Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention - Membership - Alterations aiming to remove CAIR and its representative from the Maryland Attorney General Hate Crimes Commission and instate two other Muslim appointees. My name is Rabbi Ariana Katz, and I am writing to voice my full throated support of my friend Zainab Chaudry and the Maryland Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).

I moved to Baltimore in 2018 to found Hinenu, a synagogue that gathers in Charles Village, MD. We are a community of over 250 households, 35 of which have joined the congregation since the violence of October 7 in Israel and the subsequent massacre in Gaza.

When the Tree of Life shooting happened in Pittsburgh, PA, synagogues around the country felt not just grief for the murdered Jews shot down during Shabbat morning services, but fear that our communities would be next. Around Baltimore we saw an increase in police presence outside synagogues to ensure the people inside would feel safe. At Hinenu, the first Shabbat service after the shooting, instead of police outside our building, our allies from faith communities around the city were there, led by Zainab Chaudry and CAIR. Standing outside in the rain, shoulder to shoulder with Bishop Bill Gohl, Friends from Homewood Friends, and many Muslim teens she organized, Zainab was a loving presence to all who came to the Shabbat after the shooting. She put her body in between any bad actors and the Jewish community, and she has continued to do that countless times in Baltimore and Maryland.

In the days after the October 7 attacks, when we were overwhelmed with shock and fear and grief for our loved ones in Israel, we also knew that violence was surely on its way for the people of Gaza. Not just retaliatory violence, but floodgates of revenge that would open. And we were sadly not wrong—in the 129 of days since October 7, 28,064 Palestinian people have been killed, 67,611 Palestinian people insured. 1,139 Israelis were killed in the Hamas attacks of October 7. These

numbers, the images coming out of Gaza, the stories we are all flooded with are devastating--I ask you to read these numbers a second time: in the 129 of days since October 7, 28,064 Palestinian people have been killed, 67,611 Palestinian people insured, 1,139 Israelis were killed in the Hamas attacks of October 7. As I write this, the people of Gaza who fled to Rafah at the instruction of the Israeli Defence Force are now being bombed as they shelter in mere tents.

The reasons supplied for removing Zainab Chaudry from the Hate Crimes Commission are posts she made on social media, including one with an image of the Brandenburg gate, saying "that moment when you become what you hated most," equating the Israeli government with the Nazi regime. The caption in her friend's original post, which did not crossover when shared, read "Never again is happening again."

"Never again is now" is a call to action used by Jewish organizers standing in opposition to brutal and inhumane anti-immigrant action by the US government, as well as in response to the Israeli government's war in Gaza.¹

In the last few months, Zainab and I have had many conversations, including about the sensitivity of making such comparisons. Through heartfelt conversation, amidst the pain, trauma and grief we and our communities have been experiencing at the horrific violence unfolding, we were able to understand, empathize with one another, and center each other's shared humanity. Some of Ms Chaudry's posts called into question simply call the war in Gaza a genocide, something that on January 26, 2024 the International Court of Justice ruled "plausible" that Israel has committed acts that violate the Genocide Convention.²

I cannot say it more clearly than this: anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism. The reason for removing Zainab Chaudry from the Maryland Hate Crimes Commission claims to be because of a social media post. But it is clear to so many of us that the push to remove her from the Commission is because of her opposition to the Israeli war in Gaza, hiding it behind claims that her critiques are anti-Semitic.

Zainab, a member of the Hate Crime Commission, has ironically herself, been subjected to death threats and a floodgate of the most vile hate from people who are attacking her for defending the humanity of Palestinians. Is there room on this Hate Crime Commission to acknowledge the

¹ <https://www.neveragainaction.com/>,

² <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-importance-of-the-icj-ruling-on-israel>
<https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-federal-judge-says-israel-plausibly-committing-genocide-biden-must-take-note/#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20District%20Court,the%20international%20prohibition%20against%20genocide.%E2%80%9D>

humanity, pain and trauma of dozens of Maryland families enduring hate because of their Palestinian identity, while also having loved ones killed in Gaza?

If the Maryland General Assembly wants to remove Ms. Chaudry from the commission, it is not because of her qualifications, or her commitment to defending the dignity and freedom of Muslims and all other religious minorities in Maryland, but an equation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, and a desire to censor speech, even when misguided, to eliminate critique of the Israeli government.

CAIR's National Executive Director Nihad Awad made remarks at a conference last fall that were spliced into a video mischaracterizing his message and intent, and widely distributed. He is on public record addressing this disinformation campaign.³ Some have provided members of this assembly false information that the White House has disconnected with CAIR. CAIR remains engaged with partners on all levels of the government, and while it is no longer part of the White House Taskforce to Combat Anti-Semitism because of bad faith attacks, it consistently condemns all forms of hate including anti-Semitism, and remains very much engaged on Islamophobia and other matters.

Removing a community leader like Zainab from the Hate Crime Commission sends a very dangerous message that these vile attacks can be successful in achieving their aim of disempowering Muslim communities, and that Muslims are welcome on the Hate Crime Commission as long as they do not speak out in against the war in Gaza. As a Maryland resident, I am ashamed that this bill has advanced as far as it has, and that we would besmirch another member of our community's name in such a way.

I urge you to vote no on HB0763, and instead to turn to building more understanding of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, as well as all internalized prejudices that keep our communities from standing up for one another.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Ariana Katz

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<https://religionnews.com/2023/12/22/as-a-muslim-i-condemn-attacks-on-both-israeli-and-palestinian-civilians-president-biden-should-too/>
https://www.cair.com/press_releases/statement-by-nihad-awad-on-remarks-at-palestine-human-rights-conference/