



February 13, 2024

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

Re: Testimony SUPPORTING HB 0555 Unauthorized Dissemination of Personal Identifying Information - Prohibition

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 strong favor of House Bill 0555 Criminal Law - Unauthorized Dissemination of Personal Identifying Information – Prohibition. CAIR is America’s largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

In recent months, my office has heard from dozens of community members in Maryland, especially students, who have been doxxed. Doxxing, derived from the word "documents," refers to the act of researching and publicly revealing private or identifying information about an individual or organization on the internet without their consent. This information might include social security numbers, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, financial details, or other sensitive data.

Doxxing is usually done with malicious intent, and can lead to harassment, stalking, or other forms of harm to the individual targeted. It's a serious violation of privacy and can lead to severe mental, emotional and physical safety consequences for the victim. It is commonly used as a tactic to target individuals based on their political viewpoints or activism for a cause.

It often leads to harassment, intimidation, and abuse, especially in cases where the targeted individual may belong to a marginalized group. It can lead to the risk of stalking, harassment, and psychological distress including anxiety, depression, and trauma. Victims may experience feelings of helplessness and loss of control impacting their overall well-being and mental health.

It can lead to academic or professional consequences including damage to one’s reputation or loss of employment opportunities, and financial repercussions, career setbacks and social stigma associated with the exposure of personal information. Victims may struggle to trust others or engage in online and offline communities.

While the term “doxxing” isn’t used in the U.S. federal criminal code, the practice itself is currently a federal crime under Title 18 U.S.C. § 119; however, this federal law only applies to the following individuals and their immediate family members:

- An elected official or employee of the U.S. government or military servicemember
- Jurors, witnesses or any other officer of any federal court in the U.S.
- An informant or witness in a federal criminal investigation or prosecution

- State or local worker or elected official whose restricted personal information is made available because of participating in, or assistance provided to, a federal criminal investigation.

However, CAIR's position is that every individual deserves to have the security and peace of mind of knowing they are protected by law from this type of harassment and intimidation.

Passing House Bill 0555 is crucial because it would extend protections to all individuals, not just a select few, by prohibiting the unauthorized dissemination of certain personal identifying information of any person, with the intent to threaten, intimidate, abuse, harass or frighten them, or place them in reasonable fear of death or serious bodily injury. It would establish critical penalties that would serve as a deterrent to this malicious practice.

HB0555 would establish clear boundaries on what constitutes permissible disclosure of personal information. It would help prevent harmful behavior and provide recourse for victims, including providing legal avenues for prosecuting offenders. This includes cases of internet doxxing or cyberbullying, which can have severe psychological and emotional consequences for victims, particularly adolescents and young adults. Legislation aimed at preventing this practice would help create a safer online environment.

These protections play a crucial role in upholding individuals' right to privacy and safety in the digital age and contribute to creating a more secure and respectful online community. Therefore, we respectfully urge a favorable report.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Zainab Chaudry, Pharm.D.
Director, CAIR Office in Maryland
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Email: zchaudry@cair.com