

February 16, 2024

Judiciary Committee
Maryland State House
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: HB0763
Position: Unfavorable

Esteemed Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett and esteemed Judiciary Committee members:

I write this testimony to express my **strong opposition to Resolution HB0763** proposed by delegates Attar, Vogel, and Rosenberg which calls for the removal of the Council on American Islamic Relations - Maryland Representation from the Maryland Attorney General's Hate Crimes Commission, to be replaced with the appointment of two Muslim commissioners selected by the Attorney General.

This is a clearly **bigoted resolution** that only **exacerbates the atmosphere of hate, intimidation, and harassment** that the **Arab and Muslim communities have been experiencing**, particularly in the past four months since Israel started its genocidal campaign in Gaza.

I would like to stress the following points:

1. The Council on American-Islamic Relations is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. Its Maryland office is the predominant organization for the Muslim community in the state that tracks and reports on hate bias incidents targeting Muslim communities. There are over 350,000 Muslims in the state of Maryland.
2. CAIR's Maryland director Dr. Zainab Chaudry is a well-respected civil rights activist and leader of the Maryland Muslim community. She is the first Muslim to serve on the Maryland State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.
3. Many residents of Maryland's diverse communities, including Zainab, have been vocal and critical of the Israeli government's horrific crimes against Palestinian Christians and Muslims. CAIR, Jewish Voice for Peace DC Metro and the Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace recently held a legislative briefing for the Maryland General Assembly on the staggering humanitarian crisis that has unfolded in Gaza.

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4. The Muslim and Arab (includes Christians) communities in Maryland --and indeed around the country-- have witnessed an unprecedented surge in racist and bigoted attacks aimed at silencing and ostracizing Americans who supports Palestinian human rights.
5. Such hateful attacks included death threats and persistent harassment to many of our community members, including Zainab. And now, this legislative attempt to remove her and CAIR from the Hate Crimes Commission, is a clear example of that broad-based campaign of hate against the Muslim and Arab communities.
6. Israeli leaders have also made genocidal remarks about the Palestinian people, calling them 'human animals', claiming that there are 'no innocent civilians' in Gaza, and threatening to ethnically cleanse millions of people. At a recent hearing in Howard County, at least 16 reports of hate bias incidents committed by anti-Palestinian demonstrators against members of our community were made to CAIR and the Howard County Police Department.
7. Attempting to legislatively remove Zainab and CAIR from this Commission because they've joined Muslim, Jewish, Christian allies, including faith leaders and other people of conscience, in criticizing the Israeli government's crimes and for expressing solidarity for human rights for all including Palestinians is unacceptable. This attack on them is an attack on all of us.
8. Conflating pro-Palestine advocacy with Antisemitism is fundamentally and categorially flawed. Supporting Palestinian human rights, or any human rights for that matter, is an enshrined right. Israel is a state, and Zionism is an ideology. Being critical of either one does not make one Antisemitic.
9. I therefore reject this attempt to further undermine our communities and undercut our voices. We respectfully call on the House Judiciary Committee to give this bill an unfavorable report. I strongly oppose this attempt to disempower and marginalize our communities.

I respectfully urge the House Judiciary Committee Chair Luke Clippinger, Vice-Chair Sandy Bartlett and Committee members to unequivocally reject any attempt to remove CAIR or Dr. Zainab Chaudry from the OAG Hate Crimes Commission.

Respectfully submitted,

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