

In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.
All praise and thanks belong to God, the Lord of the Worlds.
May peace and prayers be upon Prophet Muhammad and his family.



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February 20, 2024

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

Honorable Vice Chair J. Sandy Bartlett
House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: CAIR Testimony to OPPOSE HB0763 Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention - Membership - Alterations

Honorable Chair Clippinger, Honorable Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Robert S. McCaw, and I serve as the Government Affairs Director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. I appreciate this opportunity to testify against HB0763, a measure concerning alterations to the Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention that directly impacts my organization.

I am writing in strong opposition to the proposed removal of CAIR's representation from this commission. At this critical juncture, amid an unprecedented surge of hate targeting American Muslims,¹ it is more important than ever for the commission to include the Maryland Muslim community's leading civil rights group and expert on Islamophobia.

Our organization received over 3,500 complaints nationwide in the final months of 2023 and our Maryland office alone recorded 223 reports of hate bias complaints and requests for assistance between October 9 through December 2, 2023.² CAIR has dedicated many long hours to fulfilling the community trust placed within us and responding to the legitimate concerns and experiences of our diverse communities. This hate has been driven, in part, by the relentless dehumanization of Muslims and Palestinians in our society.

It is crucial to acknowledge CAIR's vital role in our community. CAIR routinely interfaces and engages with officials at every level of the government. As a key trusted resource for reporting

¹ CAIR, "CAIR: New Data Shows the End of 2023 was a 'Relentless' Wave of Bias, Community Resilience is 'Impressive'," January 29, 2024, Link: https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-new-data-shows-the-end-of-2023-was-a-relentless-wave-of-bias-community-resilience-is-impressive

² CAIR, "CAIR Releases Updated Number of Complaints, Bias Incidents Reported Against Maryland Muslims, Arabs in Past 8 Weeks," December 7, 2023, Link: https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-releases-updated-number-of-complaints-bias-incidents-reported-against-maryland-muslims-arabs-in-past-8-weeks

hate crimes and bias incidents, our organization consistently conveys legitimate concerns and experiences of American Muslims and provides insights and resources to local, state, and federal officials.

This attempt to remove CAIR from the commission, based on bad-faith accusations and attacks, is an attempt to silence our advocacy for civil rights and human rights. It is fueled by the failure to distinguish between legitimate criticism of a foreign government's actions versus vile bigotry, such as antisemitism.

Antisemitism is evil, dangerous, and unacceptable, and CAIR has consistently condemned it for 30 years, as you can see from the supporting documents we have provided. We have also clearly and consistently unjust wars, terrorism, and any violence against civilians, including attacks on Israeli civilians on Oct. 7th. Again, we have provided the committee with documentation.

CAIR has unwaveringly defended all communities impacted by hate and bias, including the Jewish community. I urge this committee to oppose this legislation in order to ensure that the Maryland Muslim community's leading expert on Islamophobia and hate crimes continues to serve on the commission on behalf of impacted community members.

It is important to note CAIR's Maryland office has long advocated for increased and more diverse representation on the commission in addition to our organization, including members from Palestinian Muslim and Christian communities, who have been disproportionately impacted by hate in recent months.

This can be achieved through legislative or non-legislative means but should not be couched in with a bill that aims to silence a critical voice for the concerns, experiences, and rights of Maryland's Muslim communities.

Removing the nation's largest Muslim civil rights organization from the commission would silence a vital voice advocating for safety and inclusivity, which in turn would dangerously undermine the commission's fight against hate. It would leave Maryland's Muslim communities more vulnerable to hate bias and send a dangerous message that the Hate Crimes Commission has itself succumbed to hateful and divisive attempts to undermine the humanity of marginalized communities.

For these reasons, we strongly oppose this bill and urge an unfavorable report.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert S. McCaw". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert S. McCaw
Director of Government Affairs Department
Council on American-Islamic Relations