

Testimony Opposing HB 0763 by Hena Zuberi, Director of Advocacy, Justice For All

Honorable Members of the Maryland General Assembly,

I, Hena Zuberi, Director of Advocacy for Justice For All, a nonprofit organization committed to championing human rights and social justice issues across the globe, including here in our own backyard. I am here to express our strong opposition to HB 0763, a bill that, if passed, would have significant adverse effects on the Muslim community's cohesion, trust, and the fundamental principles of justice and equality that we all hold dear.

Our organization, Justice For All, stands in solidarity with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) Maryland, an esteemed institution that has tirelessly worked to promote understanding, protect civil rights, and foster community empowerment. The leadership of CAIR Maryland has been instrumental in advocating for the rights of Muslims and other marginalized communities across the state, offering support to those affected by discrimination and hate crimes, including anti-semitism and working towards a more inclusive society.

It is with deep concern that we observe the unfounded attacks against the leadership of CAIR Maryland. These baseless allegations not only undermine the credibility and hard work of a key civil rights organization but also harm the very fabric of our community.

Choosing leadership for the Hate Crimes Commission is a significant decision. It requires more than just filling a seat; it demands appointing representatives who carry the trust and the mandate of those they represent. The Muslim community has chosen its leadership. We choose CAIR to represent us on the Hate Crimes Commission because they are our civil rights organization. They have the expertise, the experience, and most importantly, the community's backing to serve effectively in this capacity.

The leadership of CAIR Maryland has been at the forefront of advocating for policies and practices that protect and uplift all Marylanders, regardless of their faith or background. Their work has been critical in advancing dialogue, enhancing mutual understanding, and promoting the rights of individuals to live free from discrimination and hate. Any effort to undermine this work through legislation like HB 0763 not only harms the Muslim community but all communities that rely on the unwavering support of civil rights advocates.

Our community's trust in CAIR is not misplaced. Time and again, CAIR has proven itself by standing on the front lines against discrimination, offering legal support to victims of hate crimes, and educating the public about Islam, thereby combating ignorance with knowledge. Their work in collecting data on hate crimes provides an invaluable resource for understanding the scope and nature of the challenges we face. This data is not just numbers; it represents the lived experiences of our brothers and sisters, making CAIR's role in the commission not just beneficial but essential.

To appoint random community members without the requisite background or understanding of the issues at hand would not only be a disservice but could potentially undermine the commission's efforts to combat hate crimes against Muslims. It is not enough to have representation in name alone; we need representation that is meaningful, informed, and empowered to make a difference.

In closing, I urge you to consider the broader implications of HB 0763 on our community's cohesion, the respect for civil rights, and the essential work of organizations like CAIR Maryland. Let us not be swayed by unfounded allegations or actions that would weaken our collective pursuit of a just and equitable society. Instead, let us reaffirm our commitment to principles of fairness, inclusion, and respect for all individuals and their rights to effective representation and advocacy.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of my testimony against HB 0763.

Hena Zuberi