



Council on American-Islamic Relations

CAIR Office in Maryland

6120 Baltimore National Pike, Suite 2D

Baltimore, MD 21228

E-mail: mdoutreach@cair.com URL www.cair.com

Tele 410-971-6062 Fax 202-488-0833

March 5, 2025

Honorable Chair Brian Feldman
Senate Education, Energy & Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony Unfavorable for SB847 CAMPUS Act

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the EEE Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, I submit this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 847, the Maryland Campus Accountability and Modernization to Protect University Students Act.

CAIR Maryland encourages and fully supports efforts to combat hate crimes, discrimination, and violence targeting marginalized communities, especially in our institutions of learning. However, we are deeply concerned that this bill, despite its stated intentions, poses a significant threat to constitutionally protected speech, particularly for students and advocates critical of the policies of foreign governments under investigation by reputable bodies for war crimes and atrocities against humanity.

While the bill includes provisions addressing antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of bias, its mandate for institutions of higher education to adopt and enforce policies regulating the "time, place, and manner" of expressive activities introduces broad and vague standards that risk being weaponized to suppress free speech. Such policies have historically been misused to silence student groups advocating particularly for Palestinian human rights—an issue of heightened importance amid Israel's ongoing daily violence and oppression in Gaza and the West Bank. Such accounts are documented by renowned international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Israeli organization B'Tselem, as well as in films like 'No Other Land' which won an Oscar Sunday evening despite being blocked by U.S. distributors seeking to suppress these narratives from the mainstream American discourse. The 2024 film, directed by a Palestinian-Israeli collective, tells the story of the Israeli military's forced displacement of Palestinians from their land as Israeli soldiers evict inhabitants and tear down their homes. The Palestinian protagonist befriends a Jewish Israeli journalist who helps him in his struggle. They unexpectedly form a bond, but their friendship is challenged by disparities in their daily circumstances.

Additionally, the bill's requirement for institutions to involve campus security or law enforcement in response to "significant disruptions" raises significant concerns over the vague language and the potential criminalization of student-led advocacy. These provisions potentially stand to disproportionately target marginalized communities, including Jewish, Arab, Black and Muslim students whose voices are increasingly being suppressed and under attack across our country. The chilling effect on student expression and political advocacy could further erode trust between educational institutions and the diverse communities they serve.

Furthermore, SB 847 proposes the creation of a Workgroup on Combating Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and Other Forms of Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Violence, Harassment, and Intimidation. While this initiative appears inclusive, it fails to safeguard against the conflation of legitimate criticisms of Israeli government policies with

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antisemitism—a conflation that has been widely condemned by human rights organizations as a tool to silence dissent.

As an organization dedicated to defending the civil rights of all Marylanders, CAIR Maryland urges the committee to reject SB 847 and explore other more well-defined and equitable avenues to combat hatred and intolerance.

We encourage lawmakers to pursue alternative, less alarming legislation that protects all communities from hate and discrimination without suppressing student voices or undermining the fundamental right to free speech.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

Zainab Chaudry, Pharm.D.
Director, CAIR Maryland
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
zchaudry@cair.com

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