



Council on American-Islamic Relations

CAIR Office in Maryland

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February 26, 2025

Chair William Smith, Jr.
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony In Support of SB889 Distribution of Students' Personal Information - Prohibition

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), I thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 889 **Distribution of Students' Personal Information – Prohibition**, which would prohibit the unauthorized distribution of students' personal identifying information with intent to harm or with reckless disregard for potential harm. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

This critical legislation addresses the rising threat of doxxing, an increasingly common form of targeted harassment that disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, including religious minorities, and especially students of different religions, races, identities and backgrounds.

Doxxing: A Growing Threat to Privacy and Safety

Doxxing—the malicious act of publicly exposing an individual's private information without consent—has led to devastating consequences for victims. According to reputable research:

- In 2024, approximately 4 percent of Americans – an estimated 11 million people – reported that they've personally been victims of doxxing attacks.^{1,2}
- About half of all victims said their home addresses or emails were made public. About 1 in 4 said doxxers distributed their photos or videos online, and about 1 in 5 victims said perpetrators shared personal information about their families.¹
- Common consequences of doxxing include physical safety risks, academic impact, financial losses, adverse mental health consequences including anxiety and depression, damage to reputation.
- Approximately 73% of internet users report that they limit what they share online to avoid being doxxed.¹

Additionally:

- Over 43% of internet users in the U.S. have experienced some form of online harassment, and over 10% have been doxxed. (Pew Research Center, 2021)
- Students are frequent targets of malicious or retaliatory doxxing attacks, with mounting reports of high school and college students facing threats, academic repercussions, and job loss due to malicious online exposure.
- A 2023 study by the University of California found that 78% of doxxing victims reported significant mental health impacts, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD.

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Doxxing's Disproportionate Impact on Marginalized Students

Jewish, Muslim, Arab, Black, and other students of color—as well as those engaged in advocacy on issues like racial justice and human rights—have been disproportionately targeted in doxxing attacks. Students have seen their home addresses, phone numbers, and even family information leaked online, leading to death threats and online hate campaigns. These attacks are aimed to intimidate and silence them, directly undermining First Amendment rights while jeopardizing students' well-being.

In 2024, CAIR's Maryland office recorded 609 case reports of incidents, complaints and requests for assistance between January and December. Approximately 16 percent (over 90) of these case reports were of bullying and cyberbullying, including doxxing incidents targeting Muslim, Jewish and Arab (Christian and Muslim) students. Many of these students exist at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, such as “Muslim” or “Jewish” and/or “immigrant” or “queer,” putting them in an even more vulnerable position.

No student should ever have to choose between their faith, identity or convictions for fear of being maliciously targeted and attacked.

Current Laws Are Insufficient

While Maryland has laws against cyberstalking and harassment, these existing laws have many gaps and simply do not go far enough. Grace's Law was originally enacted in October 2013 to address the changing digital landscape, making the misuse of internet-based communications to intimidate or harass a minor a criminal offense. It was enacted in response to the tragic suicide of Grace McComas, a 15-year-old girl from Howard County, Maryland, who was cyberbullied relentlessly before taking her own life in 2012. Her parents, especially her mother Christine McComas, advocated for stronger laws against online harassment and cyberbullying after discovering that Grace had been subjected to months of persistent online abuse through social media.

The 2013 version of Grace's Law:

- Made repeated and malicious electronic harassment of a minor a misdemeanor, punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$500 fine.
- Criminalized the use of electronic communications to cause a minor serious emotional distress or fear for their safety

In 2019, Grace's Law was strengthened by increasing penalties for cyberbullying and expanding protections for minors. It:

- Increased the maximum penalty to three years in prison and a \$10,000 fine for cases where electronic communications cause serious emotional distress to a minor.
- Covered indirect harassment, including when a third party is encouraged to harass someone.
- Applied to social media, email, and text messages, recognizing the evolving nature of online abuse.

Senate Bill 889 seeks to build on Grace's Law and provide protections for students in both secondary and post-secondary education.

While Grace's Law targets **cyberbullying and harassment**, Senator Henson's proposed **Senate Bill 889 (2025)** aligns with the intent of Grace's Law by aiming to criminalize **unauthorized distribution of students' personal identifying information**, recognizing that doxxing can lead to **harassment, stalking, threats, and real-world violence**.

In one particularly egregious case that our office handled in December 2024, we were informed by Lt. Mable of the University of Maryland Campus Police that there was “nothing they could do” to intervene in the case of two University of Maryland students who received death threats and suffered substantial emotional, mental and physical consequences after being doxxed by a former roommate who retaliated in this manner after a University investigation concluded that there was no evidence or basis for her accusations of wrongdoing against them.

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Existing statutes simply fail to address the unique vulnerabilities of students whose information can be exploited for harassment, threats, and intimidation. SB 889 closes this gap by specifically criminalizing the malicious distribution of student information and extends protections to students in postsecondary education.

SB 889 offers vital protections by:

1. Prohibiting the intentional distribution of students' personal identifying information without consent if done with malicious intent or reckless disregard for harm.
2. Recognizing the severe emotional, psychological, and physical risks that result from doxxing.
3. Establishing clear legal consequences for perpetrators, ensuring accountability and deterrence.
4. Reaffirming First Amendment rights by balancing protections against targeted harassment with free speech considerations.

Maryland has among the strongest anti-bullying laws in our country, but in today's day and age, even these do not go far enough. Regardless of where one stands on the political spectrum, no one should ever fear for their life. The rise of online extremism, swatting, and coordinated harassment campaigns has made legislation like SB889 increasingly necessary. The passage of Senate Bill 889 would further protect students from digital harassment in an era where online attacks can have devastating consequences.

Grace was only 15 years old when our system failed to protect her. She should be here today, with her mother and family. **We simply cannot allow our system to fail more students because we did not take action.** The most important concern any student in primary, secondary or postsecondary education should ever have is passing their next exam or preparing for a quiz. No student, regardless of their race, religion, ethnicity, or any protected classification, should ever have to worry about being defenseless and unable to protect themselves from these malicious attacks.

I respectfully urge you to pass SB 889 in honor of Grace's memory, for the witnesses who are testifying here today, and for all of those who wanted to be here today but were too afraid fear of drawing more unwanted attention to themselves.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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1. <https://www.safehome.org/family-safety/doxxing-online-harassment-research/>
2. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/what-is-doxxing-and-how-can-educators-protect-their-privacy-online/2024/05>

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