



## Council on American-Islamic Relations

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January 30, 2025

Honorable Chair Vanessa Atterbeary  
House Ways and Means Committee  
130 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

### **Re: Testimony Favorable for HB324 County Boards of Education - Antibias Training for Members - Requirement (County Board Member Antibias Training Act)**

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), I thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bill 324, Antibias Training for County Boards of Education. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

This legislation is a necessary and proactive measure to ensure that members of county boards of education are equipped with the knowledge and skills to foster inclusive, culturally competent, and equitable learning environments for all Maryland students.

Maryland's public schools serve a diverse student population, yet bias-based incidents and discrimination persist in educational settings. According to the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) most recent bullying and harassment report, incidents based on race, religion, and national origin continue to be among the most frequently reported forms of discrimination in schools.<sup>1</sup>

CAIR Maryland's civil rights data collected in 2024 documented numerous complaints from students and families regarding Islamophobic, anti-Palestinian, and other forms of biased treatment in schools, including:

- Reports of students being subjected to offensive stereotypes by educators and administrators.
- Censorship of Arab and Muslim students advocating for Palestinian human rights.
- Inadequate responses from school officials to bullying incidents targeting Muslim and other minority students.

These were among the most frequent type of cases of 609 cases of complaints, incidents and requests for incidents documented by CAIR Maryland in 2024.

### **Evidence-Based Benefits of Antibias Training**

Studies have shown that antibias training leads to improved educational outcomes and a more inclusive school climate. Research from the National Education Association (NEA) and the Southern Poverty Law Center indicates that when school officials receive cultural competency and antibias training:

- Implicit bias in disciplinary actions is reduced, leading to more equitable treatment of students.<sup>2</sup>
- Educators and administrators are better equipped to respond effectively to incidents of discrimination and harassment.<sup>3</sup>
- Schools experience a decline in bias-related conflicts and an increase in student engagement and academic performance.<sup>4</sup>

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### **Accountability for School Board Members**

While Maryland already mandates antibias training for certain school personnel, HB 324 extends this requirement to county board members who play a critical role in shaping policies that impact students and educators. Given the increasing reports of school-related discrimination, it is essential that decision-makers receive the necessary training from reputable sources to understand and address bias effectively.

By mandating at least one antibias training session per board member's term, HB 324 ensures that education policymakers are up to date, well-informed and prepared to uphold Maryland's commitment to equity and inclusion in schools.

CAIR Maryland is seeking a favorable report on HB 324 to help build a safer, fairer, and more welcoming educational environment for all students especially considering the troubling rise of Islamophobia, antisemitism, and anti-Palestinian erasure and censorship. Ensuring that those who govern our schools are equipped to recognize and combat bias is a critical step toward achieving educational equity in Maryland.

We thank you for your time and consideration and respectfully request a favorable report on HB 324

Respectfully,

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### **References:**

1. Maryland State Department of Education. (2023). "Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation in Maryland Public Schools: Annual Report."
2. National Education Association (NEA). (2021). "The Impact of Implicit Bias in Schools and How Training Helps."
3. Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance. (2020). "The Impact of Antibias Training on Educators and Students."
4. U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2018). "The Benefits of Cultural Competency Training in K-12 Education."

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