



## Council on American-Islamic Relations

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Chair Ben Barnes  
House Appropriations Committee  
120 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

### **Re: Testimony In Support of HB 1455 State Retirement and Pension System - Divestment From Israel**

Dear Chair Barnes and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 1455. This legislation represents a measured, principled, and constitutionally sound effort to align Maryland's public investments with widely recognized human rights standards and the values of accountability, transparency, and ethical governance.

At its core, HB 1455 seeks to ensure that Maryland's State Retirement and Pension System does not continue to invest public funds in entities directly tied to the government of Israel, particularly in the form of sovereign debt and related financial instruments. At a time when renowned, credible international bodies - including the United Nations, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch - as well as Israeli human rights organizations including B'Tselem, have affirmed that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza and extensive human rights violations in the region, Maryland has both a moral and fiduciary obligation to evaluate whether its investments are consistent with its stated commitment to human dignity and justice.

Importantly, this bill is narrowly tailored and fiscally responsible. It applies only to actively managed separate accounts, thereby avoiding disruption to commingled or passively managed funds. It also explicitly preserves the fiduciary duty of the Board of Trustees by allowing divestment actions only where they can be executed at fair market value or greater, and where such actions are consistent with the Board's obligations. These safeguards ensure that Maryland retirees are protected while still advancing ethical investment practices.

HB 1455 is also consistent with longstanding precedents. States, including Maryland, have previously taken similar action to divest from regimes engaged in egregious human rights violations, such as apartheid South Africa and the government of Sudan during the Darfur genocide. In each of those cases, divestment was not only a moral statement; it was also a recognition that public funds should not be complicit in systemic injustice. This bill follows in that same tradition.

We want to note that the bill provides appropriate legal protections for fiduciaries acting in good faith and requires regular reporting to ensure transparency and legislative oversight. These provisions reinforce both accountability and prudent governance.

For many Maryland residents - including Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian communities - this issue is deeply personal. We are witnessing the devastating humanitarian consequences of ongoing violence and occupation while knowing that our own state's pension funds are invested in entities directly connected to those harms. HB 1455

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offers a pathway for Maryland to act with integrity, ensuring that taxpayer-backed investments do not contradict the values of equity, human rights, and justice that our state strives to uphold.

For these reasons, CAIR Maryland respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 1455.

Sincerely,

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