



**House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee  
The Honorable Melissa Wells, Chair  
The Honorable Ken Kerr, Vice Chair  
Lowe House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401**

**March 17, 2026**

**FAV | HB 661 – COMMEMORATIVE MONTHS MUSLIM AMERICAN HERITAGE  
and JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTHS**

Greetings Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and honorable members of the committee. My name is Gregory Yancey. I serve as Chief of Staff for the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives. We have the proud honor of hosting the Maryland Commission on Middle Eastern American Affairs among our Ethnic Commissions. First and foremost, I want to thank Delegate Wolek, Solomon, and others for their leadership and responsiveness to our interfaith community on this historic opportunity. To the Muslim community, I say "As-salamu alaykum". To the Jewish community, I say "Shalom", and to all of my other fellow Marylanders - I say "Peace be unto you".

In addition to wishing peace, we have a proposition before us where we can implement peace and build community. This will be the second year in a row for this legislation and for so many, this could be the greatest accomplishment of the 2026 session. This bill lays paths to peace.

The following 7 states recognize Muslim American Heritage Month in January: Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and Utah. January was chosen to honor the anniversary of the death of Yarrow Mamout, an African American Muslim who was enslaved, purchased his freedom, and became a financier.

Thirty seven states and more than 200 cities recognize Jewish American Heritage month in May. Due to my limited time, I will not identify all 37 states.

Our Middle Eastern American Commission voted unanimously in support of this legislation: legislation that would bolster cultural understanding and appreciation. We are constantly hearing about hate bias and hate crimes of islamophobia and antisemitism. People are targeting individuals and houses of worship with a common message of terror. **You are different and you are not welcomed.** This bill provides a different message. It says: **we appreciate differences and all are welcomed in Maryland.** Governor Moore has been clear in saying that “Hate has no home in Maryland.” This bill provides an opportunity to provide insight and understanding of the cultural contributions of Muslim and Jewish Marylanders. The commemorative months will open doors to so many community celebrations, cross cultural exchanges, and prototypes of peace for our children that will serve them well when times of divisiveness and overseas strife arise. Awareness dismantles stereotypes, ignorance, otherization, and hate.

For these reasons, I request a favorable report on HB 661.

Respectfully,

[Gregory Yancey -GOCI-](#)