



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

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Chair Heather Bagnall
House Health Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony In Support of HB 1402 Medical Examiner - Release of Body - Requirements for Muslims

Dear Chair Bagnall and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) Maryland, we respectfully submit this testimony in support of House Bill 1402. HB 1402 addresses a deeply important religious obligation for Muslim families: the timely burial of their loved ones. In Islam, the deceased are required to be buried as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours of death, as an expression of dignity, respect, and spiritual responsibility. Delays in the release of a body following an autopsy can therefore create profound hardship for grieving families who are trying to fulfill these sacred rites.

This legislation establishes a clear and reasonable standard by requiring medical examiners to release the body of a deceased Muslim within 48 hours after the completion of the autopsy once notice of the individual's faith has been provided. Importantly, the bill also outlines practical and flexible ways that such notice can be given - including confirmation from next of kin, an imam, a mosque, a will, or documented funeral arrangements.

For many Muslim families in Maryland, delays in the release of a loved one's body can mean being unable to perform the ghusl (ritual washing), funeral prayer (salat al-janazah), and burial in accordance with their faith. These rituals are not optional traditions; they are core religious obligations that carry profound spiritual significance.

HB 1402 helps ensure that Muslim families are able to honor their loved ones in accordance with their faith while still allowing medical examiners to fulfill their investigative responsibilities. The bill does not interfere with the performance of an autopsy when one is required. Rather, it simply ensures that once the autopsy is complete, the body is released promptly so that burial rites may proceed without unnecessary delay.

Maryland is home to a rapidly growing and vibrant Muslim community. Like all Maryland residents, Muslim families deserve to have their religious practices respected, particularly during moments of profound grief and loss. Similar accommodations already exist across the country in jurisdictions that recognize the importance of religious burial practices.

This bill represents a modest but meaningful step toward ensuring that religious freedom and cultural dignity are upheld within Maryland's public health and medical systems. By establishing clear procedures and timelines, HB 1402 will also provide greater clarity for both families and medical examiners during an already difficult time.

At its core, this legislation affirms a simple principle: that every family deserves the ability to lay their loved ones to rest with dignity and according to their faith.

For these reasons, CAIR Maryland respectfully urges the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1402.

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Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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

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