



## Council on American-Islamic Relations

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Chair Sandy Bartlett  
House Judiciary Committee  
100 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

### **Re: Testimony In Support of HB566 Distribution of Students' Personal Information - Prohibition**

Dear Chair Bartlett and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Maryland office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) in support of House Bill 566 which would prohibit the unauthorized distribution of students' personal identifying information with intent to harm or reckless disregard for harm.

CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, and our Maryland office works routinely with students, families, and community members impacted by discrimination, harassment, and online targeting. HB 566 is a necessary and constitutionally sound step toward protecting students across the state of all faiths and backgrounds from the modern scourge of doxxing – a practice that is becoming increasingly pervasive, dangerous, and deeply harmful.

Doxxing is the act of publicly exposing another person's private information online without consent. While it can affect individuals of all ages, students are especially vulnerable. In 2025, approximately 4% of Americans – an estimated 11 million people – reported being victims of doxxing.<sup>1</sup> One in six Americans (16%) knows a friend or family member who has been doxxed, showing how far the ripple effects extend.<sup>1</sup> About half of victims reported home addresses or emails being exposed, and 1 in 4 reported photos or videos were publicly shared.<sup>2</sup> (*Sources: SafeHome.org; Education Week research on online safety trends*) These statistics illustrate that doxxing is a serious and growing problem, and our laws are outdated.

Common consequences of being doxxed include threats to personal safety, academic consequences, financial damage, and severe mental health impacts including anxiety and depression. An increasing number of Americans are reporting limiting what they share online out of fear of being doxxed.

The National Association of Attorney Generals confirmed in its August 2025 report that "doxxing incidents are no longer isolated or fringe acts," but rather now represent a broader digital threat paradigm where harassment, misinformation, and real-world violence intersect.<sup>3</sup>

Students with leadership roles or who are involved in campus activism, are more vulnerable to being targeted, and have suffered:

- Serious emotional distress, including anxiety, depression, and trauma;
- Academic disruption from threats, forced withdrawal from classes, or fear of attending campus;
- Reputational harm, affecting future employment and educational opportunities;
- Death threats and physical safety risks, particularly when personal information including phone numbers, email addresses, and home addresses are made public.

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Numerous studies show that doxxing and related forms of online harassment are associated with serious mental health impacts, including symptoms consistent with PTSD.<sup>4</sup> Research on victimization among students and young people indicates that disclosure of personal information without consent correlates with emotional distress and psychological harm.

Across the State of Maryland, students from marginalized groups - including immigrant, Jewish, Black, Muslim and Arab backgrounds - have faced heightened risk of doxxing aimed at intimidation or silencing. Targeted campaigns against vulnerable communities often escalate to online harassment, death threats, and backlash that existing gaps in current laws prohibit addressing effectively.

In fact, in multiple cases of doxxing incidents against students at the University of Maryland College Park, campus police notified CAIR that “their hands were tied” and that there was nothing that could be done because no laws were being broken despite the clear harm that was being inflicted against victims of doxxing attacks.

In one particularly egregious case that our office handled, we were informed by Lt. Mable of the University of Maryland Campus Police that they were essentially powerless 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.

Existing statutes simply fail to address the unique vulnerabilities of college and university students whose information can be exploited for harassment, threats, and intimidation. HB 566 closes this gap by specifically addressing the malicious distribution of student information and extends protections to students in postsecondary education.

In 2024, CAIR’s Maryland office recorded over 600 civil rights case reports and requests for assistance. Of these, approximately 16% (90+) involved bullying or cyberbullying, including doxxing incidents targeting Muslim, Jewish and Arab students. Many of these students exist at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, putting them in an even more vulnerable position.

These are not abstract incidents - they have real and lasting consequences on a student’s well-being, academic success, and sense of safety on campus and in the community.

Maryland’s current anti-harassment and cyberbullying laws - including Grace’s Law - address general online harassment and repeated harmful communications for minors, but they do not go far enough. They were not written with modern digital doxxing in mind, nor do they specifically address the nonconsensual distribution of personal information with malicious intent.

Grace’s Law, first passed in 2013 and expanded in 2019, made cyberbullying a misdemeanor. It was enacted after the tragic suicide of teen Grace McComas, who endured relentless online harassment. This law focuses on harassment communications - not the publication of personal data used as a tool to harm. House Bill 566 does not criminalize speech, target political advocacy, or punish criticism or protest. Instead, it focuses narrowly on the malicious distribution of a student’s personal identifying information without consent, when done with intent to cause harm or with reckless disregard for that harm. This distinction matters constitutionally and morally.

**HB 566 builds on this foundation and seeks to expand on Grace’s Law to provide protections for students in both secondary and post-secondary education.**

The First Amendment upholds and protects speech, including speech that is unpopular or offensive. But courts have long recognized that speech integral to criminal conduct - such as threats, harassment, stalking, and intimidation - is not protected. HB 566 is carefully crafted to fit within that constitutional framework.

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It qualifies that our state will not allow the weaponization of personal data against students. It establishes that safety and civil liberties are not mutually exclusive. And it affirms that accountability can coexist with constitutional rights.

**At its core, this bill is about preserving students' well-being and safety, and their right to engage in debate and advocate on different causes. Protecting students from doxxing attacks protects the very expression of ideas that the First Amendment was designed to uphold.**

Maryland has led our nation before in responding thoughtfully to digital harms. Unfortunately, that action was proceeded by a tragic and avoidable death. It's past time we address the existing gaps, before more serious harm occurs. Passing HB566 continues the tradition of not silencing speech, but rather drawing a clear line between expression and exploitation.

Delegate Martinez' bill aligns with the intent of Grace's Law by recognizing that doxxing can lead to harassment, stalking, threats, and real-world violence.

This bill:

1. Prohibits intentional dissemination of students' personal information without consent when done with intent to harm or with reckless disregard for harm.
2. Recognizes the serious physical, emotional, and economic harms caused by doxxing.
3. Provides clear, enforceable penalties - a misdemeanor with up to 1 year in jail or \$5,000 fine - to deter malicious actors.
4. Affirms constitutional protections, including the First Amendment's free speech and press guarantees, by excluding legitimate journalistic or academic uses.

It's important to note that HB 566 balances safety and rights. **It does not criminalize legitimate reporting, research, or academic activity, and clearly excludes protected speech under the U.S. and Maryland Constitutions.**

CAIR is a strong advocate for free speech and supports this measure as constitutionally sound. Our office has also spoken to students victimized by doxxing who were so deeply affected by their ordeal that, in at least two cases, they confessed they had thoughts of ending their lives.

**The fact is that our laws need updating, and we cannot wait until another life is tragically lost before action is taken.**

Ultimately, there's no debate about whether students deserve to be safe in their schools and on their campuses. Regardless of their political views, race, religion, ethnicity, or any other protected characteristic, they should not fear that a roommate, classmate, dissenter, or anonymous online stranger can maliciously expose their personal data, undermine their safety, and disrupt their lives with impunity.

In the spirit of Grace McComas's memory, and for all the students of diverse backgrounds who are suffering anguish and distress because our laws have failed to protect them from malicious harassment, CAIR respectfully urges a favorable report on HB 566.

Sincerely,

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References:

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