



## Council on American-Islamic Relations

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March 10, 2026

Chair Jheanelle Wilkins  
House Ways & Means Committee  
130 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony In Support of HB 1174 Howard County - Board of Education - Mandatory School Holidays  
Ho. Co. 11-26**

Dear Chair Wilkins and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the **Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) Maryland**, we respectfully submit this testimony **in strong support of House Bill 1174**.

HB 1174 represents an important step toward ensuring that Maryland's public schools reflect the diversity and lived realities of the communities they serve. By requiring the Howard County Board of Education to observe major religious and cultural holidays - including **Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Diwali, Lunar New Year, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Juneteenth** - this bill promotes fairness, inclusion, and equal access to education for thousands of students and families.

For many Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Asian American families, these holidays are among the most sacred days of the year. Yet for decades, many students have been forced to choose between observing their faith and attending school, often missing important academic instruction, exams, or school events. No child should have to face that dilemma simply because their religious or cultural identity is not reflected in the school calendar.

In Howard County — one of the most diverse counties in Maryland — thousands of students celebrate these holidays. In fact, school absences on Eid in particular have historically been so high that schools have had difficulty maintaining normal instruction on those days. Recognizing these holidays as school closures is therefore not only equitable, it is practical and responsive to the realities on the ground.

Maryland has already taken important steps toward recognizing religious diversity in school calendars. Several school systems have acknowledged the need to ensure that Muslim, Jewish, and other minority students are not placed at a disadvantage because of their faith traditions. HB 1174 continues that progress by ensuring that all major communities in Howard County are treated with dignity and equal consideration.

Beyond logistics, this legislation sends an important message to students: that their identities, cultures, and religious traditions matter. Inclusive school calendars foster belonging, respect, and cross-cultural understanding, values that strengthen both our schools and our broader society.

For Muslim students in particular, recognition of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha is long overdue. These holidays mark the end of Ramadan and the culmination of the Hajj pilgrimage - two of the most significant observances in Islam. Ensuring that Muslim students can celebrate these days with their families without penalty is a simple but meaningful step toward educational equity.

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HB 1174 also reflects the spirit of Maryland's commitment to diversity by recognizing holidays celebrated by many different communities, including Diwali, Lunar New Year, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Juneteenth.

This inclusive approach ensures that no single community is singled out while others are ignored. Instead, it affirms the shared principle that every student deserves respect and accommodation for their cultural and religious identity.

For these reasons, **CAIR Maryland respectfully urges the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1174.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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