



Council on American-Islamic Relations

CAIR Office in Maryland

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February 11, 2026

Chair Jheanelle K. Wilkins
House Ways and Means Committee
131 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony Opposing HB 198 School Systems - Reportable Offenses - Notification of Student as Suspect

Dear Chair Wilkins and Members of the House Ways & Means Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations Maryland (CAIR), we respectfully urge an unfavorable report on House Bill 198. CAIR is the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. Our mission includes protecting civil rights, promoting justice, and ensuring that all students regardless of background have equitable access to safe and supportive educational environments.

House Bill 198 expands existing reporting requirements by allowing school systems to be notified when a student is merely a suspect in a criminal investigation, even if no charges have been filed. This represents a significant departure from current policy, which generally focuses on arrests or verified offenses.

Allowing schools to receive and act upon information about students based solely on suspicion risks undermining the presumption of innocence and exposes students to disciplinary or academic consequences before any legal determination is made. Students can face altered school placements, exclusion from programs, or stigmatization based on incomplete or evolving investigations. Even when a student is later cleared, the educational and reputational harm may already be done.

Data consistently shows that students of color, immigrant students, and students with disabilities are disproportionately subject to law enforcement contact and criminal investigations. Expanding school notification to include students identified as suspects risks reinforcing existing disparities and accelerating the school-to-prison pipeline.

For many Black, Latino, immigrant, and minority families, law enforcement suspicion alone can carry significant stigma and fear. Policies that allow educational decisions to be influenced by unproven allegations risk deepening mistrust between families and schools and may discourage students from seeking help or engaging fully in their education.

While the bill includes confidentiality provisions, it still expands the number of individuals and institutions receiving sensitive investigative information about minors. Information about a student being a suspect - even temporarily - can influence disciplinary decisions, educational programming, and peer perception.

Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to long-term harm from premature labeling or stigmatization. Educational environments should prioritize student development, rehabilitation, and fairness, rather than extending law enforcement processes into school decision-making before cases are resolved.

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Maryland law already requires notification when students are arrested for serious offenses, ensuring schools can respond to verified safety risks. HB 198 goes beyond these protections by lowering the threshold from arrest to suspicion. This expansion is unnecessary and risks harm without clear evidence that it improves school safety.

CAIR supports policies that protect school communities while respecting the constitutional rights and developmental needs of young people. School systems should focus on evidence-based safety strategies such as counseling, behavioral intervention, and restorative practices rather than policies that risk labeling students during early stages of investigations.

We respectfully urge the Committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 198. Protecting school safety is essential, but it must be done in ways that uphold due process, protect student privacy, and prevent disproportionate harm to vulnerable student populations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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