

March 10, 2026

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

Re: Testimony In Support of HB 1202 Public Schools - Content Standards, Curriculum, and Bullying Policies - Culture and History of Palestine

Dear Chair Wilkins and Members of the Committee:

I write in strong support of HB 1202 as someone who has lived the consequences of a curriculum that consistently distorted the history of my ancestors and my faith. As a student in American public schools, I learned early to dread the units on the Middle East and Islam. At the start of each year, I would flip immediately to those chapters—not out of interest, but to see what distortions, omissions, or outright falsehoods I needed to brace myself for. Palestinian history in particular was routinely reduced to a “religious conflict,” instead of being presented through an accurate, human-rights–based account of dispossession and the current reality on the ground. Islam, likewise, was framed through a lens of violence and backwardness, rather than as an Abrahamic faith with a rich intellectual and spiritual legacy.

This kind of instruction does not stay confined to the page. It normalizes double standards, legitimizes hostility, and creates a school climate in which Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students are more likely to be bullied and treated as objects of suspicion or ridicule than as equal classmates. When the curriculum repeatedly dehumanizes, demonizes or erases a people, it lays the groundwork for harassment and hate incidents—like the one this year at Walt Whitman High School, where a Star of David appeared alongside “Nuke Palestine” and “F*** Muslims.” Similar hateful rhetoric is echoed by some members of Congress, reinforcing an oppressive, dangerous environment for Palestinian students and for anyone perceived to be associated with them.

HB 1202 is a necessary step to help correct this pattern. By requiring age-appropriate, fact-based instruction on Palestinian culture and history, it shifts our classrooms away from propaganda and toward honest education. Teaching about Palestinians as full human beings with complex histories and diverse identities strengthens critical thinking and leaves less room for prejudice to take root. Equally important, explicitly naming anti-Palestinian bias in bullying and harassment policies sends a clear

message that this form of discrimination is real, unacceptable, and subject to the same standards as other protected-class harms.

I know firsthand what it means to have your identity distorted by the very materials meant to educate your peers, and it is long overdue to spare today's students that same harm. HB 1202 comes at a critical moment when accurate education about Palestine matters more than ever. I respectfully urge a favorable report on this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Reem Azzam