



Council on American-Islamic Relations

CAIR Office in Maryland

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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:

On behalf of the Maryland office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), we respectfully urge a **favorable report on House Bill 1202**. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. This bill represents a necessary step toward ensuring that Maryland's public schools provide inclusive, accurate, and culturally grounded education while protecting students from harassment and bias.

HB 1202 is not abstract or theoretical - it responds to *real events happening in our public schools*. In one recent case, in January 2026, Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian hate graffiti was discovered on an exterior wall at Walt Whitman High School in Montgomery County, including violent slurs and calls for the destruction of Palestinians.

SEE: CAIR Maryland, Muslim Council Condemn Islamophobic and Violent Hate Graffiti at Walt Whitman High School

https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-maryland-muslim-council-condemn-islamophobic-and-violent-hate-graffiti-at-walt-whitman-high-school/

This vandalism was widely condemned not only by civil rights organizations but also by school leadership, county officials, and elected representatives at the local, state, and federal levels. Principal Gregory Miller called the messages "*profoundly offensive, threatening, anti-Palestinian, and Islamophobic hate speech*," unacceptable in any school community. Montgomery County leadership - including the County Executive and County Council - publicly reaffirmed that such hateful conduct has no place in Maryland schools or communities. Members of Congress representing the area also denounced the incident and stood in solidarity with students targeted by that hate. This response reflected the seriousness with which this act was understood and rejected by leaders across government.

The fact is that this was *not an isolated vandalism*. While it was one of the first anti-Palestinian bias incidents to garner widespread public condemnation, it reflected deeper patterns of misunderstanding and dehumanization that have often manifested in school environments when students lack accurate knowledge about diverse cultures and histories. Such incidents not only threaten student safety but also undermine the educational mission of our schools and the dignity of students targeted because of their identity.

HB 1202 directly addresses these harms by:

1. **Requiring factual, age-appropriate instruction about Palestinian culture and history** within Maryland's social studies standards - strengthening cultural literacy that can prevent ignorance-based bias and stereotypes from taking root.

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2. **Ensuring local curriculum development and teacher resources** so that Palestinian cultural and historical content is taught in a balanced, nonpartisan way that enhances critical thinking, media literacy, and mutual respect.
3. **Updating Maryland's anti-bullying model policy to expressly also include conduct motivated by anti-Palestinian bias**, closing a gap that currently leaves some students without clear protection in existing statewide frameworks.

This bill explicitly protects academic freedom and constitutional rights - the instruction should be factual and non-advocacy; it must respect diverse perspectives and integrate seamlessly into existing standards. HB 1202 strengthens Maryland's commitment to inclusion without politicizing the curriculum.

This legislation is not about taking sides on international issues - it is about ensuring that all Maryland students learn in a safe, respectful, and culturally literate environment. When students see themselves and others reflected accurately and humanely in school curriculum, we make it harder for hate to flourish and easier for young people to engage respectfully with complex global histories and identities.

Our office has handled cases of both Christian and Muslim Palestinian students who have shared a visceral fear for their safety and well-being especially in today's climate where their very identity has been politicized. These children deserve to feel safe and protected, just as much as all other students.

For these reasons, CAIR Maryland strongly supports HB 1202 and urges a favorable committee report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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