

In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful  
All praise and thanks belong to God, the Lord of the Worlds  
May peace and prayers be upon Prophet Muhammad and his family.



**Council on American-Islamic Relations**

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December 4, 2023

The Honorable Virginia Fox  
Chair  
U.S. House Committee on Education and The Workforce  
2176 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House Committee on Education and The Workforce  
2101 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**RE: Urgent Request for Hearing on the Rise of Islamophobia and Violence against Muslim Students**

Dear Chair Fox and Ranking Member Scott:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, I write to address a matter of utmost importance and urgency that pertains to the safety and well-being of American students, which will be discussed during tomorrow's hearing on "Holding Campus Leaders Accountable and Confronting Antisemitism."

We are deeply concerned about the recent surge in Islamophobia and Antisemitism, particularly on American college campuses, which has resulted in targeted harassment and violent attacks against Muslim and Jewish students across the nation. We urge the House Committee on Education and Workforce during tomorrow's full committee hearing to also address the below-highlighted concerns about Islamophobia on school campuses nationwide, as it is crucial to ensure equitable attention to the distinct challenges encountered by Muslim students.

It is our firm belief that the rights of Muslim and Jewish students to receive an education in a safe and inclusive environment are in peril. Recent events have shown a national surge in Islamophobic incidents, which includes acts of violence and intimidation from California to Florida. The situation is further exacerbated by current statements made by some members of Congress who are seeking to introduce resolutions and hold hearings about only acts of harassment and attacks on college campuses targeting Jewish American students while ignoring the safety and security of their fellow Muslim classmates. These actions, while well-intentioned, do not frankly speak to the broader issues of violence and intimidation that both Muslim and Jewish students are currently facing.

Since the escalation of violence in Israel and Palestine, CAIR received more than **1283 requests for help and reports of bias**<sup>1</sup>, showing a 216 percent increase over the previous year. These incidents span a broad spectrum of hostility, including harassment, discrimination, and threats, affecting students who are visibly Muslim or who have spoken up for protecting civilians in Gaza.

Students expressing their support for Palestinian rights have faced extreme consequences for their activism, including the publicizing of their personal information through digital trucks that have circled campuses like Harvard and Columbia University. Recently, on November 25, three Palestinian college students wearing traditional Palestinian scarves were shot in Burlington<sup>2</sup>, Vermont, during the Thanksgiving holiday. The students were walking on Prospect Street enroute to visit their grandmother when a white man confronted them with a handgun. The man, without speaking, discharged at least four rounds, and fled on foot. Jason Eaton, the 48-year-old accused of the shooting, has pleaded not guilty. One of the three students, Hisham Awartani, a 20-year-old student at Brown University, is now paralyzed from the chest down after sustaining a gunshot wound that lodged in his spine.

Muslim students are being subjected to discrimination and harassment at an alarming rate, with one member of Congress having used offensive and derogatory language by comparing Palestinians to "Nazis." Such rhetoric from leadership figures only serves to exacerbate the harassment and discrimination faced by Muslim students. Allow me to draw your attention to some specific incidents that have occurred recently:

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<sup>1</sup> Bailey, Chelsea. "CAIR Received an 'Unprecedented' 1,283 Reports of Anti-Arab and Islamophobic Bias in the Last Month, New Data Shows." *CNN*, November 9, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/09/us/cair-unprecedented-surge-anti-muslim-bias-reaj/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Tebor, C., Abdallah, K., McKend, E., & Sottile, Z. (2023, November 27). 3 Palestinian students were shot in Vermont. Civil rights groups are calling for a close look at the motive. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/26/us/palestinian-students-shot-burlington-vermont/index.html>

- On Wednesday, October 11, 2023, at the University of California<sup>3</sup>, Los Angeles (UCLA), during a virtual Palestine Emergency Panel, a group of students was threatened and labeled as terrorists by a group of individuals who entered the building. The incident escalated to the point where the students had to leave the building for their safety.
- On Thursday night, October 12, several individuals harassed students<sup>4</sup> at the University of Texas during a Palestine Solidarity Committee meeting that addressed the recent violence in the Gaza Strip. These individuals were captured on video using profanities, calling students terrorists, and throwing papers at attendees.
- On Tuesday, October 31, 2023, a Muslim student faced exclusion<sup>5</sup> from Bloomfield Hills High School in Michigan for declining to respond to inquiries regarding her involvement in a peaceful protest at the school. Following a walkout for Palestine, students were called to the office and questioned about their participation and intentions, with those who chose not to disclose their political beliefs or exercise their First Amendment rights facing school suspension pending an investigation.
- On Wednesday, October 25, 2023, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis ordered state universities to ban pro-Palestinian student organizations.<sup>6</sup> This represents a significant erosion of education, freedom of speech, and social justice initiatives, including the banning of anti-racist courses and attempts to criminalize protests. Freedom of speech gives students the right to express their unique views on issues of the day without facing the threat of violence from their neighbors or censorship from the government.
- On Thursday, November 2, 2023, a hit-and-run targeting an Arab Muslim student was reported on Stanford University's campus, with the incident involving a suspect who allegedly shouted offensive remarks.<sup>7</sup> The victim, a pedestrian, sustained injuries, and the suspect fled in a black Toyota 4Runner. According to the initial report, the driver “made

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<sup>3</sup> “CAIR-LA Condemns Attacks against Pro-Palestine UCLA Students, Calls for Investigation and Ban by School,” October 17, 2023. [https://www.cair.com/press\\_releases/cair-la-condemns-attacks-against-pro-palestine-ucla-students-calls-for-investigation-and-ban-by-school/](https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-la-condemns-attacks-against-pro-palestine-ucla-students-calls-for-investigation-and-ban-by-school/).

<sup>4</sup> *CAIR-Texas Calls for Campus Ban of Men who Harassed Students at U. Texas Palestinian Solidarity Meeting*. (2023, October 13). [https://www.cair.com/press\\_releases/cair-texas-calls-for-campus-ban-of-men-who-harassed-students-at-u-texas-palestinian-solidarity-meeting/](https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-texas-calls-for-campus-ban-of-men-who-harassed-students-at-u-texas-palestinian-solidarity-meeting/)

<sup>5</sup> *CAIR-MI to Hold Press Conference with Family of Student Removed from Bloomfield Hills High School for Refusing to Answer Questions About Participation in Walk Out for Palestine*. (2023, October 30). [https://www.cair.com/press\\_releases/cair-mi-to-hold-press-conference-with-family-of-student-removed-from-bloomfield-hills-high-school-for-refusing-to-answer-questions-about-participation-in-walk-out-for-palestine/](https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-mi-to-hold-press-conference-with-family-of-student-removed-from-bloomfield-hills-high-school-for-refusing-to-answer-questions-about-participation-in-walk-out-for-palestine/)

<sup>6</sup> Farrington, B., & Binkley, C. (2023, October 25). Florida orders state universities to disband pro-Palestinian student group | AP News. *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestine-desantis-florida-education-sjp-12b4d4f2bdd8618c12b8a29cc852be25>

<sup>7</sup> Yang, Anna. “Hit-and-Run Injures Arab Muslim Student, Incident under Investigation as Hate Crime.” *The Stanford Daily*, November 5, 2023. <https://stanforddaily.com/2023/11/04/hit-and-run-injures-arab-muslim-student-incident-under-investigation-as-hate-crime/>.

eye contact with the victim, accelerated, and struck the victim.” The incident is being investigated as a potential hate crime, given the reported bias-motivated language used.

These are only a snapshot of countless more incidents of Islamophobia, harassment, and violence against students across America. Regardless of faith, these stories are profoundly concerning and demand immediate attention. The rise in discrimination, violence, and the silencing of voices Muslim students on campus is an alarming trend that must be addressed promptly. We must work tirelessly to ensure that all students can learn in safe and inclusive environments, regardless of their background. **It is imperative that this committee and its counterpart in the U.S Senate take decisive action to combat these injustices and continue to promote the principles of a safe, educational environment that values freedom of speech for all students.**

CAIR is committed to working with you and the committee to ensure the safety and rights of all American students. CAIR has submitted a parallel letter to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your prompt and effective response. Please contact us if you require any further information or if we can help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Robert S. McCaw". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Robert S. McCaw  
Director of Government Affairs Department  
Council on American-Islamic Relations