

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF 9/11 ADVOCACY COALITION

### TUESDAY, JULY 9, 2024 HEARING ON THE 9/11 MEMORIAL & MUSEUM ACT, H.R. 5401 HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Committee,

We, a broad coalition of faith and secular leaders, advocates, historians, educators, and directly impacted 9/11 family members, write to express our concerns regarding HR 5401, which proposes increased funding for the National 9/11 Museum. While the Museum operates as a non-profit, it continues to disregard public input and fuels anti-Islamic rhetoric. There are significant opportunities for improvement in its governance, transparency, and inclusivity.

The Museum has faced challenges in managing funds and has taken public funds while operating in a manner that does not always align with the guidelines of public institutions and the norm of transparency. The Board has resisted incorporating the powerful legacy of inter-religious response, recovery efforts, and reconciliation work. Additionally, the Museum has maintained certain exhibits, such as the 20+ year old video “The Rise of Al Qaeda,” which could benefit from updates to reflect a more balanced perspective. Furthermore, the Museum's leadership has continued to support Board member Debra Burlingame, despite her history of controversial statements, including publicly sharing anti-Muslim sentiments by calling Muslims “weird animals” and connecting the practice of Islam to extremism and violence.

Our coalition is committed to working collaboratively to ensure that the Museum can fulfill its mission in a way that is inclusive and respectful of all communities. To this end, we propose the following recommendations for the Subcommittee's consideration:

1. **Reinstate a Multifaith Advisory Committee:** The Museum should reinstate a multifaith advisory committee to review exhibit content and meet with the board and leadership quarterly.
2. **Ensure Transparent Governance:** The Museum should commit to transparent governance, adhering to budget targets and development strategies aligned with philanthropic standards.
3. **Implement an Academic Review Process:** The Museum should create an academic advisory council to ensure scholarly rigor and prevent the conflation of Islam with Al-Qaeda in its exhibits.
4. **Highlight Diverse Contributions:** The Museum should explicitly address the diverse contributions of Americans of all faiths and backgrounds in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.
5. **Enhance Public Engagement:** The Museum should institutionalize public-facing processes and community engagement, creating multiple platforms for community participation, including directly impacted families.

In addition, we suggest considering the Memorial's operation under the National Park Service, with the museum and its archive managed by the Smithsonian.

We strongly oppose Congress passing HR 5401 to provide more funding for the Museum due to its refusal to engage in constructive dialogue with groups such as this diverse coalition that includes those who lost loved ones during 9/11, historians, clergy, and civil society leaders. Addressing the public's concerns regarding the content shared with the thousands of visitors each day is crucial.

We believe these steps will help the Museum operate in a manner that is inclusive, transparent, and reflective of the diverse fabric of our nation. We urge the Subcommittee to withhold additional funding until these recommendations are addressed.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to working together to support the Museum in becoming a beacon of inclusivity and understanding.

Sincerely,

**Husein Yatabarry**  
**Executive Director**  
**Muslim Community Network**

*"As we seek to remember and honor the tragic events of September 11, it is essential that the National 9/11 Museum embodies the values of inclusivity and respect for all communities. I urge Congress to reconsider additional funding for the Museum until it addresses the anti-Muslim rhetoric within its exhibits. It is difficult for participants from our program and Muslim communities from across the city to engage with an institution that perpetuates such bias. The Museum must commit to transparent governance and constructive dialogue to truly serve as a beacon of unity and understanding, reflecting the diverse fabric of our nation."*



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**Heba Khalil**  
**Executive Director**  
**Emgage NY**



**The Rev. Dr. Chloe Breyer**  
**Executive Director**  
**Interfaith Center of New York**

*“Representing an organization that worked with diverse faith leaders and volunteer chaplains at Ground Zero directly after 9/11 attacks, it is ICNY's view that the Museum has never reflected the multifaith make-up of both victims and responders. Also, the Museum lacks any in-depth education about Islam, and without that context, the "Rise of Al-Qaida" video only feeds visitors' religious and racial prejudices.”*



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**Peter B Gudaitis**  
**Executive Director and CEO**  
**NYDIS New York Disaster Interfaith Services**

*“The museum's long troubled finances and overpaid staff, along with its rejection of collaboration with faith-based stakeholders, and its harboring a prominent bigot on their board, have caused us to lose faith in their leadership and the institution.”*



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**Todd Fine**  
**President**  
**Washington Street Advocacy Group**

*“The organization should not receive federal funding if it won't be accountable to the public and its representatives in the manner of sites managed by the National Park Service.”*

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**Talib Abdullah**  
**Executive Director**  
**ACCESS of WNY**



**Marwa Janini**

**Executive Director  
Arab American Association of New York**



**The Arab American  
Association of  
New York**

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**Afaf Nasher  
Executive Director  
Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR-NY)**

*“As a civil rights organization, we often feel the impact of biased narratives that fuel hateful tropes. Educational and cultural centers, such as museums, have an immense responsibility to challenge ignorance with the highest levels of academic rigor and public messaging. The 9/11 Memorial Museum needs to be especially careful given the raw, traumatic nature of its content. No tax dollars should fund 9/11 remembrance that advances division between Americans.”*

