



Council on American-Islamic Relations

Greater Los Angeles Area Chapter

2180 W. Crescent Avenue, Suite F,

Anaheim, CA 92801

Tel (714) 776-1847 Fax (714) 776-8340 cairla.org

Corona del Mar Middle and High School – Principal

Attn: Dr. Jacob Haley

2101 Eastbluff Drive

Newport Beach, CA 92660

jhaley@nmusd.us

Newport-Mesa Unified School District (NMUSD) — Superintendent

Attn: Dr. Wesley Smith

2985 Bear Street

Costa Mesa, CA 92626

superintendent@nmusd.us

NMUSD Board of Education — President

Attn: Ashley Anderson

2985 Bear Street

Costa Mesa, CA 92626

aanderson@nmusd.us

Dear Principal Haley, Newport-Mesa Unified School District Administrators, and Board Members,

We, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Los Angeles, are writing to express our deep disappointment regarding reports of the recent decision to suspend an eighth-grade student at Corona del Mar Middle and High School for saying “free Palestine.” We fully stand for maintaining a positive and inclusive learning environment in our schools. However, your decision to suspend the young student does not demonstrate an environment of tolerance or fairness in the school district. Even more concerning, the decision by the school to suspend the student for expressing support for a free Palestine raises concerns about the school’s potential infringement of the student’s freedom of speech and the school’s selective punishment of the student given the student’s national origin and ethnicity as well as the reports that the student was responding to constant bullying and being called a “terrorist” by another student.

We want to take this as an opportunity to not only raise our concern regarding the targeting of the student but to educate the District. Studies by CAIR-CA and other organizations have shown that Muslim, Palestinian, and Arab students are already at an increased risk of peer-to-peer bullying, discrimination, and harassment from school administrators, and since Oct. 7, anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian rhetoric has been increasing, especially in schools. When schools fail to address bullying and fail to acknowledge the realities, struggles, and humanity of Muslim, Palestinian, and Arab students, this can contribute to a hostile school environment. The school’s actions indicate that the school targeted the Palestinian American student because of



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his legally protected identity and that the school did not meet its obligation and responsibility to protect this student from threats and harassment. Under California law, all students have the right to participate fully in the education process, free from discrimination and harassment. Furthermore, the alleged targeting and suspension of this student for his expression is a potential violation of the student's First Amendment Rights. Such rights, as clearly established in Supreme Court precedent, do not end at a school's gates. As the California Attorney General has recently made [clear](#), schools cannot curtail students' free speech just to avoid discomfort or inconvenience created by the airing of specific views or beliefs, and schools may not discipline students solely because they have engaged in speech that would be constitutionally protected off campus. The student's statement of "free Palestine" is not obscene, libelous, or slanderous and does not create any clear or present danger of unlawful actions and must be protected—especially given the student's protected identity as a Palestinian-American.

The phrase "free Palestine" is a phrase to acknowledge Palestinian's right to exist freely on their land, without occupation. Over the past 75 years, the Palestinian people have experienced immense suffering, displacement, and a 15-year-long inhumane siege and blockade in Gaza, which has been described as "the largest open-air prison" by human rights organizations. "Free Palestine" is not a threat; it is standing in solidarity with innocent Palestinians.

As a district tasked with educating and caring for a diverse student population, the District should be proactive in protecting all students from bullying, harassment, and unfair selective punishment. Failing to take action risks subjecting Muslim and Palestinian students to further bullying, discrimination, and retaliation.

We strongly urge the District to use this situation as an opportunity for education and dialogue, investigate the claims of bullying against the suspended student, remedy the harms caused to the student by ending the suspension and removing it from his student record, and take appropriate action to ensure a safe, inclusive environment for all students.

Lastly, representatives from our organization will be attending the Nov. 14 Newport Mesa School Board meeting to raise our concerns regarding the school's recent actions.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or updates. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hussam Ayloush".

Hussam Ayloush, M.B.A.
CAIR-LA Executive Director