



August 29, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

RE: Ensuring a Safe and Welcoming Environment for Muslim Students for the 2024-2025 Academic Year

Dear Esteemed Educators and School Administrators,

I am the Civil Rights Managing Attorney for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Greater Los Angeles Area Office – one of four offices that make up CAIR California (CAIR-CA). CAIR-CA is a nonprofit American-Muslim civil rights advocacy organization with the mission to enhance the understanding of Islam, protect civil rights, promote justice, and empower American Muslims.

As the new academic year begins, I am writing to express concerns about the safety and well-being of Muslim, Palestinian, and Arab students at your school and urge your district to collaborate with civil rights advocacy groups and experts to create a safe and welcoming environment for BAMEMSA (Black, Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian) students. Every student in California has the right to a learning environment free from bullying, discrimination, and harassment based on religion, race, ethnicity, or national origin, as well as the First Amendment right to express themselves without fear of retaliation.

Since October 7, 2023, Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian hate have surged, with CAIR tracking a significant increase in incidents targeting these students. Unfortunately, these high rates of hate and discrimination remain elevated across the country and reflect a troubling trend that CAIR has documented even before October 7th. As we discuss below, Muslim students in California are already at a higher risk of bullying and discrimination than their non-Muslim counterparts. These incidents become even more intensified around the anniversary of September 11 when Muslim students are increasingly ostracized due to false associations with 9/11.

Now, due to the ongoing hostilities in the Middle East, Muslims and Palestinians have been particularly impacted by a surge of anti-Arab, anti-Palestinian, and Islamophobic prejudice and hate. From January to June 2024, CAIR documented [4,951](#) complaints across the country, a 69% increase over the same period in 2023. In Southern California, our CAIR offices saw a 186% increase in complaints received from October 7, 2023, to June 30, 2024. During that time, we saw a 1264% increase in hate crimes and hate incidents reported to us and a 259% increase in complaints from grade-school students. Students complained of being targeted, bullied, harassed, and subjected to unfair disciplinary actions because they were Muslim, Palestinian, or Arab. Many students, including

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those who are Muslim, Palestinian, Arab, and Jewish, have also reported being singled out, doxxed, harassed, and unlawfully disciplined by their schools for engaging in First Amendment-protected speech advocating for the end of violence in Gaza and advocating for Palestinian human rights, dignity, and self-determination.

For the past decade, CAIR-CA has conducted biennial surveys to assess the school climate for Muslim students aged 11-18 in California and to understand how Islamophobia manifests in the education system. The state-wide surveys consistently show that 40-50% of Muslim students report being bullied, with nearly half feeling unsafe, unwelcome, or uncomfortable at school due to their Muslim identity. According to CAIR-CA's most recent [report](#), published in October 2023, nearly half of students (46%) reported being bullied at school by another student because they were Muslim. Additionally, one out of every three students who were bullied reported that bullying has negatively impacted their physical, mental, or emotional well-being. Unfortunately, the surveys consistently show that it is not only peers engaging in bullying, but also that adults, whether teachers, administrators, or staff also engage in unlawful discriminatory conduct towards students. Specifically, 25% of students reported that an adult at their school made offensive comments or acted in a way that was offensive to Islam or Muslims.

These findings highlight the pervasive and multifaceted nature of bullying faced by Muslim students, and those perceived as Muslim, in California schools. The data underscores the critical need for intensified efforts to combat discrimination and protect these students. CAIR-CA regularly advocates for BAMEMSA students who are subjected to discriminatory bullying, biased treatment by educators, Islamophobic curriculum, or need religious accommodations. Drawing on extensive experience, CAIR-CA launched a statewide Center for the Prevention of Hate and Bullying, aimed at pooling resources across California to combat the long-standing and increasing bullying of marginalized students. The Center's goals include enhancing engagement with educators and providing training and resources to school districts.

At CAIR, we stand ready to provide the training solutions and curricula suggestions that schools in your district may need to navigate the new challenges that could arise during the 2024-2025 school year. Absent proper training, occurrences of situations that involve hate, bullying, and discrimination against your school's BAMEMSA student body may constitute wrongful conduct under the law and result in violations of students' rights to a safe and non-discriminatory learning environment. As an organization with many years of experience uprooting racial and religious biases, this is our area of expertise. We can help districts eradicate Islamophobia in their schools and ensure that Muslim youth across the state feel safe and valued in their learning environment. To that end, CAIR-CA has also prepared an [Educator's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices](#) as a resource.

I am available to arrange a meeting to discuss these concerns as well as any potential next steps. We look forward to your response and full attention to these important matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dina', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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