



January 8, 2024

Dear Superintendent Wayne and Board of Education Members Boggess, Weissman-Ward, Alexander, Fisher, Lam, Motamedi, and Sanchez:

We write this letter in support of the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) as it faces an investigation by the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) after being singled out for its work supporting Arab youth and families in San Francisco public schools and the Bay Area at large.

In the three months since October 7, there have been multiple attempts by organizations, individuals, and elected leaders to attack and undermine AROC as an organization, its credibility and reputation, and its work. These attacks are in retaliation of AROC's work towards justice and liberation of Arab and Muslim people -- including advocating for the self-determination for Palestinians.

We recognize SF Guardians' letter instigating this investigation as a bad faith effort to weaponize process and procedure against the only organization in SFUSD campuses that provides Arabic language services and support to Arab youth and families. SF Guardians has not raised any issue with other demonstrations in which SFUSD students have participated and been supported by external non-profit organizations. Past examples of similar walkouts include students protesting [gun violence in 2018](#), [sexual assault in 2021](#), [anti-Trans laws in 2022](#), and [attacks on LGBTQ+ youth in March 2023](#).

Their selective targeting of AROC is unambiguous in the complaint's very first sentence, which attempts to radically misrepresent AROC's organizational goals. Rather than "a political organization committed to anti-Zionism / ending the state of Israel," AROC is a long-celebrated San Francisco organization, which since 2008 has facilitated youth organizing and leadership development, provided immigration legal services to Arab immigrants, and led intersectional community work advancing policy changes that have benefited all city residents.

AROC has also specifically focused on serving poor and working-class students and families—those with the least access to opportunity, stability, and upward mobility in San Francisco. The complaint hinges on three specific accusations in which AROC allegedly violated stipulations in its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with SFUSD, all easily dismissible:

Accusations one and three allege that AROC violated the terms of its MOU by disrupting the normal activities of the school day and using USD data to contact and organize students (the latter purely speculative).

The complaint in earnest boils down to: Did AROC violate the terms of the MOU in the capacity of the services described in the MOU? The October 18 walkout was student-led and hardly specific to schools with AROC services (only six of the 17 schools with walkouts), evidencing this action as removed from the core leadership development and cultural empowerment AROC provides.

WASHINGTON D.C.

ALABAMA • ARIZONA • CALIFORNIA • CONNECTICUT • FLORIDA • GEORGIA • ILLINOIS • KANSAS • MARYLAND • MASSACHUSETTS
MICHIGAN • MINNESOTA • MISSOURI • NEW JERSEY • NEW YORK • OHIO • OREGON • PENNSYLVANIA • TEXAS • WASHINGTON

Furthermore, AROC's provision of supplemental resources in support of student demonstrators is common to nonprofits with devoted functions towards youth organizing and, again, is entirely independent of its function in the capacity of the MOU.

Accusation two alleges that AROC broke its anti-discrimination clause, finding fault with the aspirational call for Palestinian liberation of "[From the River to the Sea](#)" and equating critique of the political ideology of Zionism to antisemitism. AROC's close partnership with Jewish-led organizations like [Jewish Voice for Peace](#) and [If Not Now](#) demonstrates how hollow this claim is, and we condemn the one-sided effort to apply an extremist interpretation and far-right standard to an examination of this speech as inequitable and wrong. It is intentionally misleading to conflate advocacy for Palestinian liberation and equal rights with antisemitism.

This conflation is designed to suppress liberation movements and sends the wrong message to Arab and Muslim students that their civil liberties and cultures matter less than those of other students.

AROC has and continues to provide a crucial platform for Arab and Muslim students who have been forced into excruciating silence in their schools, condemned to suffer alone through this immense trauma. The student-led protest of SFUSD's offices on December 13 demonstrated the pain this investigation has amplified for students already feeling unprotected by SFUSD and the crucial role AROC plays as the only Arab organization supporting them. AROC has long been a target of those who seek to undermine, delegitimize, and dismantle it since its very early years.

Many of you have direct experience with the organizations and individuals that are lobbying you against AROC as an organization, and against any initiative AROC champions, including the Eid resolution, which initially came before you over a year ago and which is still pending implementation and adoption. We condemn those who unjustly target AROC and undermine its work in schools and our communities to score political points and leverage. The disregard for Arab and Muslim students and the message that this sends to our community is clear.

We remain firmly in solidarity with AROC against the lies and the weaponization of rules it faces at this critical moment in time. We urge you to protect your most vulnerable students at this time and end the baseless investigation.

Sincerely,

Zahra Billoo, Esq.
CAIR San Francisco Bay Area

Alejo
Trabajadores Unidos Workers United

Allyson Eddy Bravmann
San Francisco Education Alliance

Andrew Dai
Democratic Socialists of America, San
Francisco Chapter

Angelica Cabande
SOMCAN

Annie Lee
Chinese for Affirmative Action

Antonio Díaz
PODER

Camilo Pérez-Bustillo
National Lawyers Guild-SF Bay Area
Chapter

Cassandra Curiel
United Educators of San Francisco

Cat Brooks
Anti-Police Terror Project

Celi Tamayo-Lee
SF Rising

Chris Ballard
Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth

Rev. Deborah Lee
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity

Didi Mamaligas
Showing Up for Racial Justice, San
Francisco

Donna Willmott
Catalyst Project

Elaine Villasper
Filipino Community Center

Ellen Brotsky
Jewish Voice for Peace – Bay Area
Chapter

Eunice Hernandez Chenier
Pangea Legal Services

Jessica Salans
If Not Now

John Avalos
Council of Community Housing
Organizations

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb
Shomeret Shalom

Margot Goldstein
International Anti-Zionist Network

Maria Zamudio
Housing Rights Committee of San
Francisco

Narissa Lee
San Francisco Committee for Human
Rights in the Philippines

Niloufar Khonsari
Bala Rising

Phyllis Shulman, Ph.D., MFT
Therapists for Peace and Justice

Sarita Lavin
SF Movement of Rank-and-File Educators

Shaw San Liu
Chinese Progressive Association

Zanoon Nissar
Women4Good