



Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee

HB763 Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention – Membership – Alterations

February 20th, 2024

UNFAVORABLE UNLESS AMENDED

DANA VICKERS SHELLEY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

AMERICAN CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION
OF MARYLAND

3600 CLIPPER MILL
ROAD
SUITE 350
BALTIMORE, MD 21211
T/410-889-8555
F/410-366-7838

WWW.ACLU-MD.ORG

OFFICERS AND
DIRECTORS
COREY STOTTEMYER
PRESIDENT

DANA VICKERS
SHELLEY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ANDREW FREEMAN
GENERAL COUNSEL

The ACLU of Maryland respectfully urges an unfavorable report on HB763 unless it is amended to keep the Council on American-Islamic Relations Maryland Office (“CAIR Maryland”) as a member on the Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention.

Adding additional members of the Muslim community is a positive addition to the Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention; it is obvious that removing CAIR Maryland from the Commission is based not only in Islamophobia and general hostility toward pro-Palestinian advocacy but also meant to directly silence the voice of the Director of CAIR Maryland. HB 763 is also clearly a premature move when HB 748 is only proposed legislation so there is no criteria legally established to justify this action.

Furthermore, punishing the only member of the Commission who is advocating for Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian Marylanders (AMEMSA) and furthering efforts to stop violent Islamophobic actions that are all too common across the country and in Maryland, marginalizes the AMEMSA community and sends a clear message to all AMEMSA Marylanders that their voice, their opinions, and their lives do not matter. In fact, it was CAIR that recently filed a lawsuit to defend the rights of teachers to speak out in Montgomery County, especially those from the AMEMSA community, and share their opinions without being punished for those views. Moreover, the ACLU of Maryland and our national office have consistently challenged the false contention that speaking out against a country's governmental actions is the equivalent of hate speech against individuals and groups of people who are marginalized.

Lastly, the addition of members of the Muslim community to the Commission is a positive and important step to address the rise in Islamophobia, and should be commended as adding greater legitimacy to the Commission. Although, notably, every other member of the Commission represents an organization not just an ethnicity or religious community. Removing CAIR Maryland representation is not

only a message to AMEMSA Marylanders that their voices are not equal to other Marylanders, it delegitimizes the very purpose of the Commission.

For the aforementioned reasons, I urge an unfavorable report on HB763 unless it is amended.

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MARYLAND