

# Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-7075

AN ACT CONCERNING THE AVAILABILITY OF ISLAMIC AND ARAB STUDIES

**Title:** CURRICULUM MATERIAL FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS.

**Vote Date:** 3/24/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/3/2025

**File No.:** 597

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## SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

## REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill aims to require the Connecticut State Board of Education (SBE), within available resources, to provide curriculum materials on Islamic and Arab studies to school districts. This addition builds on existing state mandates that support the inclusion of diverse historical and cultural topics, such as African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian American studies. Set to take effect on July 1, 2025, the bill is important because it promotes a more inclusive curriculum, encourages cultural understanding, and helps combat stereotypes by ensuring that students learn about the histories and contributions of Islamic and Arab communities.

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner, State Department of Education, Supports:](#) CT's Department of Education (SDE) "intentionally embeds opportunity for culturally responsive teaching and learning." The [Social Studies curriculum](#) urges students "to analyze, compare and research groups using historical and contemporary examples." The CT-SDE can develop evidence-based resources for Islamic and Arab Studies.

[Tanya Hughes, Executive Director, CT Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities \(CHRO\), Supports:](#) Islamic and Arab students need representation in public school curricula. In addition to highlighting the value these communities bring to Connecticut, other students gain "the opportunity to learn about Islamic and Arab history, religion, and culture." CT's dedication to "inclusive educational environments free from discrimination" involves ensuring all communities are "represented and valued."

[Thomas Nuccio, Megan Baker, and Yukiyo Iida, The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity \(CWCSEO\), Supports with Recommendations:](#)

Educating students for success in a globalized world requires preparing them for "the diversity [they] encounter and experience as both existing and future actors on this global frontier." Through education, children develop critical thinking skills. Providing developmentally appropriate materials about other cultures and religions will "help combat misinformation and negative stereotypes that contribute to hate speech and hate crimes." Students are better equipped for the future when education "deconstruct[s] cultural barriers and combat[s] cultural biases." As such, CWCSEO recommends "amending subsection (d) to require local and regional boards of education to utilize [Islamic and Arab] materials and instructional programs approved by the State Board of Education."

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

[Louis Burch, Legislative Coordinator, Connecticut Education Association \(CEA\), Supports:](#)

Schools must "prepare students to engage with others and thrive as respectful, informed, and productive citizens in a diverse, interconnected world." The state curriculum should strive to represent all Connecticut residents by including Islamic and Arab studies, and HB-7075 is a "cost-effective way to promote more inclusive and responsive curricula."

[Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents \(CAPSS\), Supports:](#)

CAPSS is committed to "fostering cultural awareness and understanding" in schools. An Islamic and Arab studies curriculum in our public schools is a valuable investment in CT's students.

[Dr. Matthew Conway, Jr., Superintendent, Derby Public Schools, Supports:](#) Dr. Conway supports "[a]ccess to high-quality, accurate materials on Islamic and Arab studies" in addition to "professional development opportunities to ensure educators can utilize these materials effectively and with appropriate cultural sensitivity." The optional nature of the resources gives districts flexibility when meeting the needs of their communities. Derby Public Schools strive to "provide culturally responsive education" that prepares students for a globalized world.

[Sheikh Mohammad Almassri, Imam, Norwalk Islamic Community Center, Supports:](#) Creating culturally aware students requires "incorporat[ing] educational materials that foster understanding, tolerance, and respect." Many students are unaware of Islam's history, culture, and geopolitical contributions, leading to fear grounded in misinformation and harmful stereotypes. In a globalized world, students need the ability to "analyze world events with greater nuance and critical thinking." Individuals of all backgrounds benefit from exposure to accurate and balanced Islamic and Arab educational materials. It is imperative that Connecticut's Muslim community "be actively consulted and engaged in the development of the curriculum."

[Ahmed Bedir, Leader, Omar Islamic Center of Middletown, Supports:](#) Diversity is increasing in Connecticut communities, boosting the number of Muslim students in public schools. Introducing Islamic and Arab studies "create[s] a more inclusive and accurate educational environment," "celebrates diversity," and "prepares students to thrive in an interconnected global society." All students deserve a "balanced education that recognizes the diverse

cultural and intellectual traditions that have helped shape our world," including the profound impacts of Islamic history and Muslim civilization. HB-7075 helps reduce bias and cultivate respect by offering the opportunity to correct misinformation.

[Khaled Elleithy, President, Bridgeport Islamic Center, Supports:](#) HB-7075 aims to close a major gap in Connecticut's Social Studies curricula by creating a more inclusive and historically accurate education on "the contributions of all civilizations, including the rich and enduring legacy of the Muslim world." Students will better understand the intellectual and cultural influences that have shaped the modern world. Education is the best way to fight misinformation and bias.

[Mergima AlArnaout, Supports:](#) Having moved from California in 2018, they noticed an absence of Islamic and Arabic studies in their daughter's curriculum. Her teacher was thankful for a presentation on Ramadan, about which very few students knew anything. A presentation on International Arabic Language Day "introduced students to the Arabic language, show[ed] them how it's written and point[ed] out how many Arabic words are used in everyday English, showing the impact of Arab Muslim civilization on the world today." The students were excited, providing an interactive and enriching experience for all involved. Islamic and Arab studies should be part of the curriculum, so all students benefit.

[Giovanni Galluzzo, Supports:](#) Having been born and attended public schools in Stamford, Mr. Galluzzo was never educated on Islamic civilization. He is entirely self-taught in the "important linguistic, cultural and culinary connections" his heritage has to Islamic civilization. This shared heritage "fostered a sense of connection to a broader, more diverse world." Islamic and Arab studies are critical to "equipping students with the knowledge to navigate an increasingly globalized society." HB-7075 promotes inclusivity and diversity, exposing students to "our shared human history."

[Sohail Lokhandwalla, Supports:](#) Muslim students, in the post-9/11 era, suffer being called "terrorist" as ignorance about Islam runs rampant. Between Muslim bans and wars in the Middle East, Islamophobia has risen dramatically. People are afraid of what they don't understand, and as such, the root cause of bigotry is ignorance. There is a lack of education about Islam – "a religion of nearly 2 billion people that spans countless races and ethnicities" – likely leading non-Muslim students to equate it with nothing more than wars and terrorism. HB-7075 is "a crucial first step" and desperately needed.

[Mohsin Mehtar, Supports:](#) Students need to understand the world's cultures and religions to be equipped for world affairs and the future. Education dispels myths and lies; teaching students about the contributions of Islam and Muslims will go a long way toward stifling vast Islamophobia and hatred toward Muslims.

[Sohair Omar, Director of Institutional Research & Part-Time Lecturer, Connecticut State Community College, Supports:](#) Islam is the world's second largest religion, and Muslims are around 25% of the world's population. Muslims can be any race or ethnicity. Arabs can practice any religion. To promote equality and increase understanding, education must include Islamic and Arab studies.

[Adeel Qureshi, Supports:](#) Students who study religions of the world will have diverse views of the humanities. Religious studies are part of the obligation of a parent to educate his or her

child. HB-7075 helps reverse the alienation and "void[s] in [the child's] personality buildup" that occur when schooling ignores religious education.

[Fawwad Nomani, Supports](#): Learning about the contributions and history of Muslims, especially in mathematics and sciences, will combat misconceptions.

[Iqra Abbad](#)  
[Mohammed Albayati](#)  
[Dr. Raafat Elfouly](#)  
[Huma Qureshi](#)

Four individuals submitted almost identical testimony describing the benefits of providing Islamic and Arab studies in schools. Widespread, accurate knowledge of Islamic and Arabic "contributions to history and society" will "help fight Islamophobia" by "combat[ing] misinformation" and "fear of the unknown."

[AJ, Supports](#): Connecticut's Social Studies Standards aim to create well-rounded students. Connecticut cannot effectively and accurately meet these standards without incorporating Islamic and Arab studies into its schools, as "[l]eaving out key historical facts and cultural perspectives limits [students'] education and denies them the knowledge they need to engage critically with these subjects." HB-7075 aligns with the following standards: (1) Modern World History standard MW.Geo.6.a; (2) Foreign Policy, Global Conflicts, and Cultural Shifts standard US.Geo.3.a; (3) U.S. History standard US.His.14.c; (4) Systems of Government standard 6.Civ.14.a; (5) National Identity and the Digital Age standard US.His.5c; and, (6) Economic Globalization and Global Governance standard MW.Civ.5.b. The benefits of HB-7075 are overwhelming. Students' social and emotional development is supported when they acquire understanding and empathy toward other cultures. Arab and Muslim students' sense of belonging and pride is strengthened. Connecticut, as a whole, benefits from "informed and thoughtful members" of the community.

[CJ, Supports](#): Students must learn accurate history to help society grow and improve, which includes learning from our mistakes and failures. CJ recalls a grade school classroom visit from a holocaust survivor, and the lifelong impact this had on CJ's soul. Students should learn more about Black and indigenous history to fully understand the deep roots of systemic oppression and genocide. Critical thinking and exploration should be prioritized over memorizing books and testing.

[Anonymous, Anonymous, Supports](#): Modern students must engage in Islamic and Arabic studies – including science, mathematics, and astronomy – in order to "foster cultural awareness and appreciation, and help combat misinformation and Islamophobia."

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

Four individuals submitted testimony in opposition, citing various issues unrelated to the subject matter of HB-7075:

[Sam Andrews](#)  
[Susan Lim](#)

[Harold Dubac](#)  
[Barbara Ripple](#)

**Reported by: Rebecca Hyland**

**Date: April 7, 2025**