

Education Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5328 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A WORKING GROUP TO ADDRESS ANTI-MUSLIM
Title: AND ANTI-ARAB RACISM IN SCHOOLS.

Vote Date: 3/18/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/4/2026

File No.: 516

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to create a working group to address anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism in schools throughout the state. With rising tensions both internationally and domestically, have experienced bullying, harassment, and other forms of hate due to their faith. The legislature hopes that with the establishment of a working group, the state can address anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism and hate in schools.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language of this bill changes all references of "Islamophobia" to "Anti-Muslim and Anti-Arab racism". It also adds Section 1, Paragraph 3, which provides for guidance in the creation or provision of curriculum materials and resources relating to Islamic and Arab studies. Section 1, Subsection b, Paragraphs 1-7 changes the number of appointees of the House Majority Leader, House Minority Leader, Senate Majority Leader, Senate Minority Leader, and Governor from one to two and creates guidelines about the backgrounds of the membership of the working group. The substitute language also eliminates Subsection (c) which allowed members of the General Assembly to participate on the working group. It also creates Section 1, Subsection b, Paragraphs 8-11 to expand membership of the working group. In line 76, the substitute language also changes "a report" to "guidance and resources" consistent with Section 1, Subsection (a).

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Ronnell A. Higgins, Commissioner submitted testimony in support of this legislation noting that acts of Islamophobia erode the

sense of safety and belonging that every resident of the state deserves. He stated that the Department and specifically the Hate Crimes Investigative Unit of the Connecticut State Police, has connected with communities across the state with how schools and communities deal with hate incidents. He expressed that Anti-Muslim incidents in schools are happening and bringing additional resources such as amendments to school district policies and training for educators and administrators to schools to help address islamophobia is commended.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Erna Alic submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that she supports some amendments to make it stronger. She stated that one change she supports is ensuring that the working group helps guide the creation of an Islamic and Arab Studies curriculum, including education about genocides experienced by Muslim and Arab communities. She pointed out this would be consistent and just with other curricula approved by law and Connecticut must also address the histories of other genocides and mass atrocities that shape the experiences of Muslim and Arab students, including the Nakba and Bosnian genocide. She stated that addressing anti-Muslim hatred requires acknowledging the historical significance of these atrocities. She expressed that after 9/11, incidents targeting Muslims increased dramatically which increased her parents' fear that teachers may treat her differently or people might hurt her because of her faith. Erna noted that education is one of the most powerful tools we have to prevent hatred before it turns into violence. She emphasized that when we teach students these histories honestly, we teach them the real consequences of hate and the responsibility we all share to stand against it. Erna stated that for many Muslim students, school should be a place of learning and belonging, not a place where identities are misunderstood or erased.'

Center For Youth Leadership, Hala Almasri, Executive Committee Member submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing she is fortunate to attend a school and live in a city that supports Muslim students and makes certain accommodations, when necessary, like having prayer rooms during Ramadan, allowing Muslim students to opt out of gym classes during Ramadan and more. She pointed out that the public show of support for Muslim students is one of the reasons that outward displays of Islamophobia in her school are very rare, but incidents do happen. She expressed that Islamophobia does happen in Connecticut schools and that public officials are not immune from that hatred, as seen by the attack on State Representative Maryam Khan in 2023. Hala suggested three recommendations for the legislation. The first being that the committee consider adding two students to the working group. The second is that the working group should collect lessons learned from schools that use academic coursework to fight anti-Muslim bullying and using lesson plans that emphasize human rights and inclusivity to ensure faculty and staff are aware of their own implicit biases. The final recommendation is for the working group to cast a wide net to include multiple sources of information like the United Nations International Day to Combat Islamophobia, the National Strategy to Counter Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Hate, and more.

Hamada Altalib submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding has published several high-quality research studies on the experience of bullying among American Muslim school children and the link to Islamophobia. She noted that a working group may provide a needs assessment within the state.

Shelly Altman submitted testimony in support of this legislation noting she wants her Muslim and other non-Jewish friends to know about the Pogroms and the Holocaust just as she wants her Jewish friends and family to know about the Nakba and Bosnian genocides. Shelly shared that growing up, she had little understanding of Arab culture and Islam and that was due to a failing of the school system and a bias of the society in which she lived. She expressed that schools have a critical role to play in experiencing joys and pains together and there must be curricula to prepare students with an understanding of their own and others lived experiences. Shelly noted that the Anti-Islamophobia Working Group should facilitate such curricula, should have educator union members who implement curriculum and policy, and should report directly to the General Assembly's Education Committee to ensure democratic oversight and public accountability. She emphasized that we create safety by building solidarity between Jewish, Muslim, Palestinian, Black, Brown, indigenous, immigrant, and all communities targeted by racism, as the work to protect one should be the work of all.

Muslim Justice Center, Adam Antar, Legal Director submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that the attacks of 9/11 were something that will forever be seared in the memories of those alive on that day. He stated that Muslims and people who "appeared" to be Muslim have experienced continued attacks on their community which did not end on that day and have had to deal with othering, suspicion, and violence because of that day. Adam noted that he remembers the bullying and physical violence that he faced for being Muslim and shared he understands the root cause of that was a lack of knowledge, as it is easy to fear what you do not know, and to hate what you fear. He expressed that we are living in a time where anti-Muslim violence is increasing, and he senses the othering occurring again. He pointed out that othering will further drive wedges in our community and foster an environment for hate and continued violence.

CAIR Connecticut, Sara Ashraf, Student submitted testimony sharing her experience of how Islamophobia has been normalized in schools. She stated that with global tensions rising, Muslim students are increasingly targeted and blamed, and this legislation helps ensure experiences like these are addressed systemically instead of being ignored. Sara suggests a few amendments for this legislation. She supports the working group guiding the development of Islamic and Arab studies curriculum. She suggests reaching about tragedies like Nakba, as education is essential to combat hatred. She advises the working group report to the legislature, educator unions be included on the working group, and allowing Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians to have a seat at the table. She lastly recommends no termination date for the working group.

Hashim Baghdadi submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that a Muslim student in a neighboring district reported comments made about their hijab and asked hurtful questions based on stereotypes rather than understanding. Hashim noted that the comments were framed at jokes but created an environment where that student felt singled out and uncomfortable participating in class discussions. He stated that experiences like this do not always make the headlines, but they matter as that can affect a student's confidence, mental well-being, and academic performance. Hashim shared that the working group allows educators, students, families, and experts to collaborate, study the issue carefully, and develop informed recommendations. He said this approach ensures any action taken will be grounded in research, lived experience, and the goal of improving school climate for everyone and reaffirming a core principle that discrimination has no place in our schools.

Vanita Bhalla submitted testimony in support of this legislation noting that she is not Muslim but believes this legislation could play a meaningful role in combating anti-Muslim bigotry and fostering safer, more informed school communities. She shared that the bill should be amended so that the working group is required to address the historical experiences of Muslim communities, including genocides, systemic discrimination, and documented atrocities they have faced globally and in the United States. Vanita stated that the root cause of Islamophobia is anti-Muslim bigotry and asks that the bill's language explicitly reference both anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia to accurately define the problem being addressed, as clear statutory language matters because it signals intent and ensures accountability. Vanita pointed out that if Connecticut schools teach Islamic and Arab studies, the curriculum must be comprehensive and historically balanced. She emphasized that after 9/11, many in our communities felt compelled to visibly "prove" their American identity, not out of performative patriotism, but out of fear. She shared that education is one of the most effective tools we must prevent prejudice from repeating itself and by confronting difficult truths, we are building empathy, civic literacy, and resilience within all student populations, not only Muslim students. She expressed that communities deserve a framework that leads to real educational change.

Jewish Voice for Peace New Haven, Susan Bramhall, Member Leader submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that she remembers the teachings of the tragedies of the Holocaust but did not receive any education about the numerous historical genocides against Muslim communities. Susan noted that she participated in an event at SCSU where non-Muslim women volunteered to wear a hijab for a day, and she remembers the fear that she felt and the empathy and understanding she gained from that experience. Susan stated the best way to counteract our history of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism is to provide resources to counter bias incidents but also to teach our students about Muslim and Arab cultures and history. She emphasized the bill must address anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian racism together, as there is a need to address systemic discrimination in the form of surveillance, stereotyping, and racial profiling.

Luma Chalabi submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that she experienced racism because of her faith and knows what it feels like to be singled out, misunderstood, or treated differently for her religion. She stated that as a mother, she wants her children and all Muslim children to feel equal and that no parent should have to worry about their child being bullied for their name, clothing, or faith. She expressed that Muslim students across the nation and the state continue to experience bullying, harassment, and discrimination based on their faith, ethnicity, clothing, or cultural practices. She emphasized that Islamophobia in schools does not exist in isolation, as it intersects with racism, xenophobia, and misinformation and when students are mocked, the impact is profound. Luma shared that a working group would allow educators, students, parents, faith leaders, and civil rights experts to come together to assess the scope and nature of Islamophobia in schools and reinforces our shared commitment to religious freedom.

Grace Damio submitted testimony in support of this legislation expressing the state must also address other genocides and atrocities that shape the experiences of Muslim and Arab students, including the Nakba and Bosnian genocides, as there are many benefits to teaching about those tragedies. She suggests the committee to ensure the working group reports to the legislature, educators are included as part of the working group, have broader inclusion of

Muslim, Palestinian, and Arab Voices, and address anti-Muslim, anti-Palestinian, and anti-Arab racism, as they are interconnected.

CEA, Kate Dias, President submitted testimony in support of this legislation pointing out members of the CEA stand united against hate speech and bullying in all its forms, as all members of the school community should feel safe in their learning environments, and we must come together to address and correct incidents of discrimination when they happen. She stated that acts of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim aggression have risen in recent years, making it necessary and appropriate to have meaningful conversations with students about hate speech in our communities. She advises that the working group include a seat for a teacher with professional experience dealing with religious intolerance in schools. Kate also suggests including an additional seat for a statewide teachers' union with expertise in the delivery of teacher professional development.

Not Just Us, Brian Donahue, Founder submitted testimony in support of this legislation expressing students need to feel safe, connected to others of their own and diverse faiths, respected to do well both in their community and educational setting. He emphasized if a child feels worried about their safety in the classroom, that will impact their learning and growth. Brian noted that the word "Islamophobia" needs to be replaced with "Anti-Muslim Racism." He expressed that we could learn from students and families who follow the practices of all faiths and cultures.

Newtown High School, Ali Elawa, Student submitted testimony in support of this legislation noting they takes advanced-level courses that contain misinformation and bias against Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians, and as the only Muslim in the class, it puts an unfair weight on their shoulders to have to correct it and do the teachers' job for them. They shared that the microaggressions they experience leave them feeling humiliated, and that is not something a 15-year-old should go through on a regular basis. They emphasize this affect Muslim students on an emotional and academic level, as well as a psychologically. They added that this legislation would ensure students like them do not feel like an outsider and helps them feel safe and comfortable in schools.

Bridgeport Islamic Community, Khaled Elleithy, President submitted testimony in support of this legislation noting recent occurrences where Muslims have been attacked or harassed because of their faith due to an absence of education and respect for others' beliefs. He stated that education must be part of the solution and teachers should be prepared to recognize bias, respond appropriately when discrimination occurs, and build classrooms based on respect and inclusion.

MARUF-CT, Hend Elsantaricy submitted testimony in support of this legislation stating the term "Islamophobia" should be changed to "Anti-Muslim Racism". She noted multiple recent incidents and noted that she is concerned about Muslim children who are devastated by the comments made by teachers and peers. She voiced equal concern over other students who leave school with so many biases and misconceptions created within the school, where understanding, open dialogue, and critical thinking should be standard. She suggests altering the bill so that the working group reports directly to the legislature, include Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians, as well as experienced educators to engage in creating and recommending curriculum materials. She continues suggesting the prioritization of teaching accurate history.

She expressed that curricula regarding Muslims, Palestinians, and Arabs should foster empathy and understanding while countering misinformation and dehumanization.

4Cs SEIU 1973, Seth Freeman, President submitted testimony in support of this legislation stating students learn best when they feel safe, respected, and fully seen in school. He noted that public education should prepare young people to live in a diverse democracy and that means confronting racism honestly, including anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian racism and ensuring those most affected have a meaningful voice in the work. Seth stated that he supports the recommendations of the Freedom to Learn coalition. He expressed those recommendations include explicitly naming the forms of racism, ensuring real representation from affected communities and educator unions, enabling the working group to provide curricular guidance on genocides experienced by Muslim and Arab communities, ensuring the working group reports to the legislature, and removing the working group's termination date.

Tim Gabriele submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that he has heard stories of his child's Muslim friends experiencing discrimination. He noted that some students feel so isolated in the school system they move out of the district, while others watch their behavior, speech, or dress out of fear of reprisal or microaggressions. Tim noted that with increasing domestic and international tensions, there is a potential for confusing and potentially dangerous environments for students seeking to simply express themselves and practice their religion openly in public schools. Tim expressed that this legislation would be strengthened with greater transparency and accountability by having the working group report to the legislature, like the Antisemitism working group. He added that this working group should also be formed to ensure representation from a variety of Muslims, Palestinians, and Arabs, as well as educators from collective bargaining units to ensure the voices of all stakeholders are considered.

Freedom to Learn Coalition, Pearl Granat submitted testimony in support of this legislation expressing throughout history there have always been groups who have been unfairly stereotyped, harassed, and demonized and those divisions among people can lead to the worst of human behavior: hatred and fear. She shared that as a Jew, she has experienced antisemitism and has witnessed that fear. She noted that the only way racism can be stopped is through education, as children need to learn how hatred hurts people as well as it hurts them. She emphasized that children have to learn the history of every group of people, how and why they came to America and learn to not hate. She noted she believes this is the responsibility of public schools.

Fadi Hammami submitted testimony in support of this legislation pointing out that she has witnessed and heard firsthand accounts of students being bullied, stereotyped, or made to feel unsafe because of their faith. She stated that Muslim students, especially those who visibly express their identity, such as girls who wear hijabs, often carry an additional burden of scrutiny, misunderstanding, and exclusion. Fadi shared that schools should be places of safety, dignity, and opportunity for every child, but national data consistently shows that Muslim students report high levels of bullying and religious-based harassment. She emphasized these experiences impact not only academic performance, but also a student's mental health and long-term well-being. She shared that this legislation is about equal protection and would allow educators, civil rights advocates, parents, and students to

examine the scope of the problem, identify gaps in policy, and recommend practical solutions.

Mostafa Hassan submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing an experience his wife had where a student pushed her classroom door open, threw a bag inside, and shouted "Allahu Akbar" while she was teaching. Mostafa said that the administration responded appropriately, but his wife recognized the student's behavior stemmed from ignorance and misinformation about Islam and Muslims which was shaped by negative media portrayals. He noted that our children should learn that Islamic civilization preserved and built upon the knowledge of ancient Egyptian, Roman, and Greek civilizations. Mostafa emphasized that our student should understand that civilizations are interconnected, and that human progress is the result of shared knowledge across cultures and faiths.

Bakhadir Kamalov submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that his highest priority is for his children to feel safe, respected, and treated equally in their learning environment. He noted that as global conflicts lead to increased tensions locally, Muslim students often experience stereotyping, insensitive comments, bullying, or social isolation, which can alter a child's sense of belonging and security. He emphasized that when students feel targeted or misunderstood because of their faith, it impacts their academic focus, mental health, and confidence. He expressed that establishing a working group allows educators, parents, civil rights advocates, and community leaders to carefully assess challenges and recommend solutions grounded in fairness and equal protection. He stated that as a father, he wants his children and every child in the state to grow up in schools that reflect shared values of dignity, respect, and inclusion.

Saida Kamalova submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that many educators work hard to create inclusive environments but during times of global tension, Muslim students can sometimes feel singled out due to stereotypes or insensitive remarks which can affect a child's emotional well-being and sense of belonging at school. She expressed that no child should feel singled out or treated differently because of their faith and when schools take proactive steps to address identity-based harassment and ensure equal enforcement of policies, all students benefit. She emphasized that this legislation is about protecting children and strengthening school communities, not dividing them.

Hartford International University for Religion and Peace, Hossein Kemaly, Professor of Islamic and Interreligious Studies submitted testimony in support of this legislation noting that it is a constructive step consistent with the founding ideals of the United States of religious liberty, equality before the law, and civic dignity for every citizen. He suggests instead of speaking about Islamophobia; it may be more precise to speak about anti-Muslim bigotry. He shared the objective must be to identify, analyze, and preclude anti-Muslim bigotry, while cultivating informed respect, civic trust, and social cohesion among all students. Hossein stated that when schools clearly reject prejudice and uphold fairness, they strengthen the habits of democratic citizenship itself. He expressed that addressing anti-Muslim bigotry reinforces the civic norms that allow a religiously diverse society to function with stability, mutual respect, and shared commitment to the common good.

Loomis Chaffee School, Aanum Khan, Student submitted testimony in support of this legislation noting that in many history classrooms, the first sustained academic discussion of Muslims occurs in units on the September 11th attacks, or in foreign policy discussions where

Muslim-majority countries appear solely conflict-ridden. Aanum pointed out that when an identity appears in curriculum almost exclusively in proximity to violence, students do not conclude that something is missing, but rather that something is true. She stated that she has conversed with students who decide to stay quiet rather than correct factual errors surrounding their faith, not out of personal ignorance, but because they understand if they speak up they will face: an endless torrent of follow-up questions, alongside the assumption that one person carries the explanatory weight for two billion people. She added that explicitly naming anti-Muslim racism alongside Islamophobia would promote definitional accuracy, as legislation that does not address students lived realities will not prove to be effective. She emphasized that a working group dedicated to systematic change should be required to develop concrete instructional guidance that includes the many atrocities Muslims have experienced throughout history as they are not supplementary additions, but rather corrections to an existing distortion. She pointed out that advisory structures that treat the affected community as consultants rather than architects tend to produce recommendations that are technically responsive and substantively insufficient. She expressed that integrating communities affected is not a symbolic victory, but rather a step toward purposeful equity. UCPEA (AFT Local 3695), Daniel Lis submitted testimony in support of this legislation but shared he is supportive of amendments to include Islamic and Arab studies in school curricula, ensuring the working group includes educator unions and community voices, and renaming "Islamophobia" to "anti-Muslim racism" to address structural discrimination.

Sohail Lokhandwalla submitted testimony in support of this legislation but is supportive of amendments to include anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia, the development of an Islamic and Arab studies curriculum that includes the various genocides and atrocities Muslims have faced throughout history, and that the working group be led by Muslims, for the benefit of the Muslim community and the broader public. Sohail shared that these are some of the present-day manifestations of Islamophobia, and if we want to meaningfully address Islamophobia, he encourages the committee to rework the legislation and consider the proposed changes.

Estela Lopez Espelin, LCSW submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that it will help decrease risk factors for trauma, depression, and anxiety for Muslim and Arab students. She stated that racism and invisibility of one's culture can cause feelings of shame and defectiveness in children, which are caused by negative thoughts. She shared that when students do not see themselves and their histories reflected in educational curriculums, this increases their risk of developing self-esteem problems. She emphasized that everyone should have the freedom to learn about atrocities that have occurred throughout history, so that we can work to prevent atrocities in the future. She recommends the creation of an Islamic and Arab Studies curriculum, including curriculum about genocides experienced by Muslim and Arab communities like the Nakba and Bosnian genocides. She stated that teaching about these histories reduces ignorance and counters misinformation about and dehumanization of Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians. She suggests that the working group use the term "anti-Muslim racism" instead of "Islamophobia".

Sherine Magar, Teacher submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing an incident for which she concluded a student's inappropriate response to writing his name on a worksheet was due to the limited and distorted narratives he had encountered about Muslims. Sherine stated that experience highlighted the importance of teaching accurate and balanced information about Islamic and Muslim cultures. She expressed that by introducing students to values, diversity, and contributions of Muslims, particularly their positive impact

on American society, schools can help dispel stereotypes. She emphasized that an inclusive curriculum foster understanding, acceptance, and respect, and helps clarify misconceptions often shaped by media portrayals.

Muslim Coalition of Connecticut, Aida Mansoor submitted testimony in support of this legislation expressing anti-Muslim racism is in our communities and in our schools and has caused a rise in bullying incidents, with a recent study revealing Muslim students were shown to have had the highest rates of being bullied daily. Aida said that due to this, we are seeing more children with anxiety and depression, with many Muslim children feeling the need to be silent and not express their views on subjects where Islam and Muslims are being discussed. She emphasized that all children need to be able to learn in a safe environment and that is why addressing anti-Muslim racism in schools is a necessity. She suggests changing the term "Islamophobia" to "anti-Muslim racism".

Claire Matthews submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing she wanted her children to grow up exposed to a diversity of ideas and values, broadminded and to value inclusivity. She stated that If we are going to have a working group to address antisemitism, it should be balanced with a working group to address Islamophobia. She shared that her generation are now professionals working side by side with people who have different traditions, which she notes are a strength, not a threat or a weakness.

Dr. Justine McCabe submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that American students are not born hateful but learn that irrational hate at home or school. She shared that the working group is desperately needed to counter the hate mongering of the current administration and particularly the war against Iran. She expressed that education is one excellent way to stop such hateful attitudes towards others who may be different culturally or religiously. Dr. McCabe added that that hate towards Muslims does terrible harm not only to Muslim students, but to the other student as well, as it constrains their ability to learn, and to be open to new ideas, people, and healthy ways of being in our country.

Mushter Moin submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that Muslim students and families have reported bullying, harassment, and stereotyping tied to their faith and religious identity, including being mocked, being called slurs, or pressured to explain or defend events in other parts of the world that they did not cause and cannot control. Mushter noted that families describe their children coming home from school feeling singled out, anxious, or suddenly self-conscious about their identity because of comments made in schools or on school buses. Mushter expressed that in addition to overt bullying, Muslim students and their parents have raised concerns about more subtle but equally harmful forms of unequal treatment. He pointed out that as a Muslim parent in Stamford, he hears a common theme from other Muslim families: coach their children to "stay small" and avoid drawing attention to their faith at school. Mushter stated that this constant calculation places an extra emotional and mental burden on Muslim students that other children do not carry and affects their sense of belonging, willingness to participate, and ultimately their academic and social experiences. He shared that he wants his son and children throughout the state to attend schools where they do not have to choose between their education and their identity.

Aaron Morabito submitted testimony in support of this legislation stating that students must have a safe and secure learning environment to thrive. He shared that if students are at risk of experiencing things like discrimination, they cannot focus on learning. Aaron expressed

that as humans, if our bodies are constantly in a fight-or-flight response, we do not have the cognitive ability to truly intake and learn information or feel settled in a classroom environment.

Sohair Omar submitted testimony in support of this legislation noting that the frequency and intensity of hate increase during times of war like the U.S. war on Iran. Sohair emphasized that every human life is precious, and history shows that destructive global events trigger waves of hostility that reverberate through local communities. Sohair stated that we can allow external conflicts and political forces to divide us, or we can reject hate and choose peaceful coexistence. Sohair expressed that through dialogue and education, we can respond to evil with integrity and goodness. He suggests a few recommendations for the bill, the first being renaming the working group the "anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian Racism Working Group." The second recommendation is to ensure geographic, racial and ethnic, and religious diversity in the working group's membership. Sohair similarly suggested specifying "annual cultural competence and cultural relevance training" as part of the working group's purpose.

MBTA, Yasser Saleh, Inspector submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that it would help examine whether school policies are being applied fairly and consistently, addressing bullying and harassment tied to religion, ethnicity, or global events, providing guidance and resources so educators know how to respond when tensions rise and ensuring that Muslim students are not singled out or stereotyped. Yasser noted that this legislation is about making sure that Muslim students are treated equally and protected from discrimination.

CAIR CT, Misha Shahid, Coordinator submitted testimony in support of this legislation expressing that for too long, she believed that speaking about her experiences and intersectional identity as a South Asian Muslim girl was shameful. She noted that educational negligence made her believe that the well-being, representation, and visibility of Muslim American students did not matter, and that was a narrative all Muslim students had to endure. Misha stated that together, we strive to ensure that children, parents, and families can be confident that Muslim American students are treated with respect, empathy, and welcomed by a community that values learning about our differences. She expressed that every child deserves the fundamental right to a childhood where they are treated equally and receive an unbiased education.

Trinity College, Fernando Ricardo Valenzuela, Adjunct Professor submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that the severity of this issue is prevalent enough that Muslim, in particular students, thousands of miles away from our cities, schools, and culture are cognizant and wary of it. Professor Valenzuela notes if Muslim students coming to the country for the first time are expressing such deep concern for their safety and well-being, imagine how Muslim students who have been raised in these oppressive and harmful systems from a young age must feel. He suggests utilizing "anti-Muslim racism" rather than "Islamophobia" as it better frames the issue as institutional and systemic and encourages us to examine its proliferation across policies, media narratives, and school culture. He similarly suggests that the working group provide schools guidance on Islamic and Arab studies curriculum, including curriculum about genocides experienced by Muslim and Arab communities.

Anonymous submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that they have a daughter who wears a headscarf to maintain her religious tenets and was excited to buy a stylized US flag headscarf. They noted that one faculty member reacted negatively to her, and she was called to the principal's office to get her headscarf inspected. They stated that this was a humiliating experience for their daughter and left her emotionally scarred, as she never wore that scarf anywhere again. They said that their daughter has since graduated, is an engineer, pays her taxes and votes, but has been scared off from any displays of patriotism due to her experience with one Islamophobic faculty member.

Anonymous submitted testimony in support of this legislation sharing that it is our responsibility to provide safe and equal learning environment and opportunities at our schools. They stated that Muslim students have almost no protections against Islamophobia and that it is important to give Muslim students their rights, otherwise we cannot talk about equality.

Anonymous High School Student submitted testimony in support of this legislation noting that as reports of discrimination increase and become more common, more states are agreeing to teach students about Asian American history to raise more awareness. They noted that if more states start to teach about the history of Asians, that could help students understand them more and there may be a decrease in reports of hate crimes. They pointed out that they faced racism growing up and it made them feel ashamed to be Asian and made them become more self-conscious.

The following submitted testimony in support of this legislation but sharing support for some amendments. They shared that he would like to see the term Anti Muslim Racism as opposed to Islamophobia in the legislation. They suggest including curriculum that discusses and educates about genocides and mass atrocities that shape experiences of Muslim and Arab students, like the Nakba and Bosnian genocide. They recommend including representation from educator unions on the working groups and including broader voices from Muslim communities, in particular Palestinian voices. They added that the working group should not have a termination date:

Ahmed Abdelmageed

UCPEA – AFT CT Local 3695, Nishelli Ahmed, VP for Social Justice
Connecticut Palestine Alliance

Eliza Bentley

Ginger Chapman

People's Center, Thomas Connolly, Volunteer

Jewish Voice for Peace New Haven, Nicole Davidow, Member

Tagan Engel, New Haven Public School Parent & Alumni

Joseph Foran

Dr. Jenny Haddad Mosher

Central Connecticut State University, Audra King, Professor

NHFT Freedom to Learn Coalition, Emily MacMelburn, Teacher

MARUF CT, Vina McDermott

NHFT 933 Freedom to Learn JVP, Rebecca Mickelson

CT Freedom to Learn Coalition, Ellen Rubin, Parent

Lianna Schwartz

Louise Simmons, Retired Professor of Social Work

CT Freedom to Learn Coalition, Yann van Heurck, Member

Susan Van Kleef
Margot Weiss
ACLU CT, Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel
Anonymous
Anonymous

The following submitted general support for the bill:
Islamic Association of Greater Hartford – Berlin, Ali A. Antar, Copresident and Professor
Mercedes Blye
Ruth Larson
Anum Qureshi
NBRJC, Alicia Strong, Co-Director
Student
CT AHEC, Cecil Tengtenga, Associate Director

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

The following submitted general opposition to this bill:
Anonymous
Anonymous
Anonymous

GENERAL COMMENTS:

West Hartford Public Schools, Muna Elabbas, Paraprofessional submitted testimony noting that she is proud to be part of an educational community that strives for excellence and inclusion but is concerned that her children and other Muslim children do not receive the full fairness they deserve because of their faith. Muna pointed out that schools should be a place where every child feels safe, respected, and valued, but the absence of Islamic holidays on the school calendar, while other religious and cultural holidays have been added sends a painful message which suggests Islamic religious observances are less important. She noted that Islamic holidays on the official school calendar are not merely symbolic, as it is a formal acknowledgement of the presence of Muslim students, a sign of respect for their identity and a concrete step toward genuine equity.

Reported by: Tyler Fisher

Date: 04/01/2026