

COUNCIL ON AMERICAN-ISLAMIC RELATIONS

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

JANUARY 2012

HADITH OF THE DAY

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:
"If you are put in a position of authority ... fear God and act with justice."

Assalam Alaikum Brothers and Sisters,

President's Note



As I write this message, I am reflecting about recent happenings in this country, and I realize there is much going on for the Muslims living here: on one hand, we have a mega corporation like Lowe's pulling its ad from the TV show - "All American Muslims", because Lowe's thinks there is a hidden agenda behind the TV show, and on the other hand we have the House Bill 2029 which prohibits application of foreign law in Pennsylvania court proceedings, which could hurt Muslims and Jews alike. These current events around us compel us to address Islamophobia/Shariah issues. Our communities need to be alert and be aware and be active to face these issues. CAIR Pittsburgh will bring speakers to address these topics in early 2012. Please stay tuned.

We are constantly handling civil rights complaints brought to us by brothers and sisters who face incidences of discrimination in the city. Out of these, many are employment related. We do our best to resolve the cases. However it becomes our duty to educate our community regarding their rights. Last Saturday we held a "Know Your Rights in the Workplace" workshop at the ICP, which was well received. We plan to take this workshop to other masajids too, so that those who missed it can attend it. With increase in civil rights cases it becomes imminent for us to now focus upon hiring an attorney, even if be part time. We hope to raise enough funds this time to have an attorney on board. Our next annual banquet is scheduled for March 2012, and InshaAllah we shall address our needs then.

We've had two interns for fall, Sr. Syaza Shukri and Michelle Everson, who helped with research work on Islamophobia, and civil rights. We also have two new EC members joining us this month. We wish to welcome Sr. Mariam Martin and Br. Hisham Abdelwahab on board. Sr. Mariam is an art teacher with Winchester Thurston School and has been involved with volunteering in the Pittsburgh Muslim community and Br. Hisham has much experience working with youth. Both Pittsburgh-bred members will be an asset to the board.

Last but not the least I wish to specially thank our ardent, talented volunteers Mariam Hobeldin and Reem Hobeldin for their volunteer work, helping Sr. Zohra in the office during the summer. I am sure they gained valuable experience while utilizing their time, creative talent for the benefit of the community.

Once again I'd like to emphasize that CAIR is like a watchman for us when we are so busy with our work and families. If your rights are violated or if you are marginalized, it is CAIR which comes out vocal, to address these issues. Please support CAIR locally and nationally and I am proud that our Pittsburgh community is aware of it.

Thanks much for all your support in the year 2011, and please stay tuned for our future announcements.

Jazakallah.
Azmat Qayyum
President, CAIR Pittsburgh Chapter.

CAIR Pittsburgh Team

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Azmat Qayyum

Vice President
Omar Slater

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Hisham Abdelwahab

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**To join our mailing list or
file a civil rights complaint,
reach us at:**

cair.pittsburgh@gmail.com
Phone: 412 606 3601

**Please support CAIR Pittsburgh's advocacy
work with your Zakat eligible donation.**

Mail your donations to :
CAIR PA Pittsburgh Chapter
801 Negley Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15206

2011 Civil Rights Recap

The year 2011 has been an active year for CAIR Pittsburgh chapter. For a city with merely 10,000 Muslims, the number of civil rights complaints we receive keep us on our toes, to help our brothers and sisters resolve the issues. The nature of cases have varied from case to case, from issues relating to hijab, naqab, Jumma prayers, calls from the FBI to employment discrimination to law enforcement harassment. Handicapped without an attorney, our chapter deals with the cases in the best way possible, tapping in the legal resources of CAIR's other chapters like the Ohio, Philadelphia and the DC and also the ACLU at times.

We'd like to highlight few of the advocacy work, out of the many, we handled successfully in the past year:

A brother who had difficulty attending Jumma prayers from work, was able to do so after our chapter stepped in to resolve the issue with his employers. In another instance, when a student complained of objectionable verses in her English curriculum that contained disrespectful references to our Prophet (pbuh), we met the school staff, made a presentation about Islamic beliefs, which was well received by the staff. The objectionable portion may some day be removed from the curriculum, but our immediate concern was to avail the students with correct information about our Prophet (pbuh). Sr. Zohra, our CAIR staff member, composed a well-researched handout, about the life of Prophet (pbuh) that would enable students to discern fact from fiction before proceeding with the lesson. We are grateful to the school administration and staff for their cooperation.

Lately our chapter received with 3 more cases from sisters

involving the Islamic attire: naqab, or hijab:

A sister in Naqab, was harassed by law enforcement officials while she and her husband were taking a walk around railway tracks. (This news item appeared in the local paper.) CAIR Pittsburgh received this case, and Br. Omar, referred the case to the ACLU since the ACLU is well-staffed with legal experts. At present, Br. Omar and Br. Safdar, CAIR board members, are working with the ACLU to see this case resolved with the Baldwin Boro police. A sensitivity training will be imparted to the law enforcement department. We are grateful to ACLU for attending to this case.

Another sister working at a McDonald's was asked to remove her hijab by her boss, with an excuse that the clients are not going to like it. This was clear violation of a sister's constitutional rights, Sr. Zohra brought this to the attention of the corporate office of McDonald's in Illinois, and is working with CAIR DC chapter for further action on the case.

Another sister, in naqab, was refused service at a Sunoco gas station, because of her attire, and our office contacted the corporate office of Sunoco. Sunoco offered a gift and an apology to the sister, admitting the unprofessional behavior of their employee.

Thus our relentless work must go on. We at CAIR Pittsburgh do not take the cases lightly, as it is our promise and our mission to carry on the advocacy work. With the increase in number of cases, it is now time to hire an attorney, even if he/she be part time. We foresee a lot more civil rights violation cases with Islamophobia spreading its fangs around us. May Allah Ta'ala help us protect your rights. Ameen.

Chapter Update

Omar Slater joins ACLU board



Br. Omar Slater, vice president of Pittsburgh CAIR chapter, joined the ACLU board in May 2011. Br. Omar has been a Pittsburgh resident and a part of the Muslim community ever since the community began with a handful of members. He has watched the community grow and is very concerned about the Muslim civil

rights issues. . He serves on the education committee at the ACLU. He is also represents CAIR Pittsburgh at PIIN board meetings. He is an asset to CAIR, and may Allah help him serve the ACLU and CAIR boards with much dedication.

New members join CAIR-PITT board

We welcome **Sr. Maryam Martin and Br. Hisham Abdelwahab** to our CAIR Pittsburgh board. Both have close affiliations with the Pittsburgh Muslim community. Sr. Maryam is a teacher by profession and has been actively involved at the ICP, Masjid Nur Az Zaman, Masjid Al Awwal, The Yan Taru, Muslim Women's Association of Pittsburgh, and has organized lectures and guest speaker series. Br. Hisham is focused on youth and has been involved in cross-cultural

interaction with youth activities in the leadership role as well as a mentor. He is presently a member of ICP Unity Group. Both Sr. Maryam and Br. Hisham will be assets to our chapter, InshaAllah.

Meet our 2011 interns:



Left: Sr. Syaza Shukri. Right: Michelle Everson

Syaza Shukri and Michelle Everson completed their fall internship successfully with our chapter. Their focus was helping Br. Omar Slater research paper on Islamophobia and Michelle also helped Sr. Zohra with civil rights cases. Syaza is currently a senior pursuing her degree in Political Science and history. Michelle is working towards her degree in Chinese and French with areas of interests that stretch to conflict resolution and political science and economics. She travelled to Paris and Beijing on study-abroad programs. Both have gained valuable experience interning with CAIR Pitt.

Event Round Up



Clock wise from left:

1. CAIR Pittsburgh Volunteers Mariam Hobeldin and Reem Hobeldin man the CAIR table at Point Park University "West meets Middle East," event, patiently answering queries about Islam and CAIR's mission.

2. CAIR Pittsburgh staff, board and the community members attend a luncheon in October 2011, hosted by World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh. The speaker, Farha Pandith, from Hillary Clinton's administration addressed the concerns of Muslim communities in the U.S. encouraging Muslim youth under 30 to be more proactive and assuring Muslims in general that they are welcome to be Muslims in the U.S. more than anywhere else.

3. In September 2011, the MSA-Pitt and CAIR Pitt jointly hosted a workshop on civic engagement, conducted by Jihad Saleh.

4. The Pittsburgh Area Jewish Committee (PAJC) hosted a forum on HB 2029 - the panelists were: Rabbi Scott Aaron, Prof Haider Ala Hamoudi and Rev. Lawrence DiNardo. The forum was moderated by Vic Walczak, legal director of the ACLU-Pennsylvania. The Bill vaguely states it would prohibit application of foreign law if it conflicts with principles of constitution. The Bill could affect Jews and Muslims alike.

5. CAIR officials with Vic Walczak and Prof Hamoudi.

6. On Dec 17, CAIR Pittsburgh and the ICP (Islamic Center of Pittsburgh) jointly sponsored a "Know Your Rights in the Workplace," workshop conducted by Attorney Jean Clickner of the EEOC, Pittsburgh.

Coming Event

CAIR Pittsburgh Annual Banquet

Save the date

When:

Saturday, March 10, 2012
5:00 PM – 10:00 PM

Where:

Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall
4141 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA
15213

Featuring:

Suhaib Sultan
Muslim Life Coordinator/Chaplain
Princeton University, and author of
"Koran for Dummies."

Entertainment

Ahmed Ahmed
Axis of Evil

For children

Professional Babysitting, Giggles
the Clown, Story Tellers,
Arts and Crafts

**Please stay tuned for
ticket info**

**To volunteer
call:**

**Br. Doni
412 908 1713**

**Would you like to volunteer for
Helping the Homeless?
Call Zohra @ 724 816 9586.**

Calling the bluff - House Bill 2029's anti-Muslim origins and threats to religious freedom

By Moein Khawaja

Executive Director, CAIR-Philadelphia

As our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrate Hanukkah and Christians prepare for Christmas, Muslims must contend with the fact that their own elected officials have capitulated to the hysteria of Islamophobia and are contemplating an anti-sharia bill.

On Wednesday, December 14, CAIR-Philadelphia and interfaith leaders held a press conference to challenge House Bill 2029. House Bill 2029 is the latest in a series of bills introduced in state legislatures across the country, many of which have passed. They are written by anti-Muslim, white supremacist David Yerushalmi. Although the bill itself does not mention sharia, the legislative intent is clear by its sponsors. Blatant government action against sharia, and by extension all Muslims, will not be tolerated and CAIR-Philadelphia will take a stand.

So what is sharia? In simplest terms, it is primarily a set of principles and guidelines observant Muslims follow. It also includes methodologies of jurisprudence for producing religious opinions on matters involving Muslim life. Sharia does not mean totalitarianism, and it is not a set of barbaric punishments or penal codes. In fact, sharia has become a part of Philadelphia culture. Have you ever enjoyed a gyro or platter from a food cart or restaurant in Philadelphia? Chances are the meat was halal – the sharia-compliant method of slaughtering and preparing meat. Philadelphians of all faiths consume sharia compliant food every day here in Philadelphia. Indeed, sharia has contributed to the cultural and culinary richness of Philadelphia in a way many of us take for granted, and that is but one example.

Yes, in some parts of the Muslim majority world, sharia has been interpreted, twisted and applied in extreme ways. In other instances, criminal behavior among some Muslims has been wrongfully conflated with sharia. CAIR unequivocally condemns these extremists among the Muslim community and will be the first to stand against them. But let's understand that there is already a criminal justice system in place to prosecute such individuals. We do not need a vague bill that claims to protect women in children; we have law enforcement, department of child and family services and a multitude of other agencies for that. Furthermore, the courts have made clear that religious beliefs cannot overrule civic laws.

What has arrived in Pennsylvania is the second or third version of much more explicitly anti-Muslim legislation that swept through Oklahoma and Tennessee last year. For example, what was proposed under Tennessee's anti-sharia bill was that the state's attorney general can freeze the assets of any organization that is "promoting sharia" and the government can label any group of Muslims as a "sharia organization." In other words, the sponsors of the Tennessee bill tried to make it illegal to be a Muslim.

So where does this blatant, in-your-face bigotry come from? It is the work of David Yerushalmi. In 2007, he pushed for legislation that would make adherence to sharia (in other words, the practice of Islam) a felony punishable by 20 years in prison. He urged the U.S. govern-

ment to declare a war on Islam and all Muslims. But he doesn't stop there. He believes liberal Jews "destroy their host nations like parasites" and has suggested that whites are genetically superior to blacks. Let me be clear: he is the author of Pennsylvania House Bill 2029. We know this because entire sections of the bill are identical to those authored by him for other states. Yes, sharia is not mentioned in the bill, but that is only because previous versions in other states which did mention sharia are facing tough legal battles as their discriminatory intent is quite clear. Thus, Representative RoseMarie Swanger (R-Lebanon) might be the sponsor of the bill, but she is not the author despite her claims, which is refreshing I might add.

I do not think Representative Swanger or any of the co-sponsors are anti-Muslim bigots. Rather, what is offensive is their sheer lack of due diligence and the level to which they are misinformed. As taxpayers, we send our money to Harrisburg expecting our elected officials to do their homework and to at least know who is writing their bills. I hope that upon learning more about the inspiration of her bill, Rep. Swanger will be appalled and will seek to distance herself from this mistake. Furthermore, if she is truly concerned about the welfare of women and children as she states, then she should author a bill regarding women and children. Indeed, we would support her in that effort.

Another troubling aspect of this legislation is the profound ignorance of the U.S. constitution and legal system exhibited by some of our state representatives and members of the public. It is by design impossible to have a foreign system of law or religious laws supersede the Constitution. Both Muslim sharia law and Jewish halakha law are considered by judges on a regular basis, and that is what this bill threatens, the consideration of foreign or religious laws. For example, what if a restaurant claiming to serve halal (sharia-compliant) meat is found to not serve halal meat? If there were a lawsuit brought forth against it, a judge would have to look at the sharia standards for halal meat. Simple and straightforward; it boggles my mind how that is threatening to anyone.

House Bill 2029 is a threat to the religious liberty of all Pennsylvanians, not just Muslims. And if one believes it not to be a threat, then it is redundant and has no true application. At its worst, it may just serve as a repository for anti-Muslim paranoia and fear mongering. Ultimately, this bill is a farce. America has been interacting with foreign countries, foreign systems of government and various religions since its founding and without detriment to the Constitution. It's comical to think that a bill titled "American Laws for American Courts" would need to be introduced in 2011, over 200 years after the Constitution was written. CAIR-Philadelphia is calling the bluff, the ignorance and the bigotry behind this bill.

If this does get anywhere, we are fully prepared to defeat it on First Amendment grounds. Not only are we not seeking to overturn the Constitution, it is our last line of defense in the struggle against Islamophobia and ignorance.

**House Bill 2029
is a threat to the
religious liberty
of all
Pennsylvanians,
not just Muslims.**

ABOUT CAIR

CAIR is America's largest Islamic civil liberties group, with regional offices nationwide and in Canada. Its mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding. The national headquarters is located on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C.

(www.cair.com)

Since its establishment in 1994, CAIR has worked to promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims in America. Through media relations, lobbying, education and advocacy, CAIR puts forth an Islamic perspective to ensure the Muslim voice is represented. In offering this perspective, CAIR seeks to empower the American Muslim community and encourage their participation in political and social activism.

CAIR-PA is a nonprofit 501(c)(3), grassroots civil rights and advocacy group, organized under 501 (c) (3) with EIN: 54-2174614 - pa.cair.com