

PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF:

Shireen Shaaban
4985 Cemetery Rd
Hilliard, Ohio 43026

IN SUPPORT OF:

HB 353: Enact The Testing Your Faith Act

Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee

[Columbus, OH, 11/30/22] — Dear Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Martin, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education. My name is Shireen Shaaban, and I am the Community Relations Assistant for the Ohio Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, known as CAIR-Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify to House Bill 353 and thank you to Representative Click and Representative Miranda for sponsoring this important legislation.

CAIR-Ohio is Ohio's only organization dedicated to protecting the civil liberties of Ohio Muslims. We work to encourage dialogue, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.

Religious accommodations are a cornerstone of the right to freedom of religion in the United States. Ensuring the ability to practice one's faith may often require reasonable accommodations to standard practices at work or school, which are protected under the U.S. Constitution.

As a recent college graduate, I can attest to how difficult it can be when an exam, class, or presentation falls during Eid or Ramadan. I have had to jump through hoops as Ramadan has aligned with finals week for my last two years of being a student at The Ohio State University. OSU and colleges around the country typically have a large and growing Muslim student population. Therefore, having the accommodations and regulations outlined in HB 353 would not only minimize the challenges and barriers that Muslim students often experience as minorities on campuses, but it would also significantly improve the performance of students in their academic endeavors.

While we must continue to do more to ensure equity for religious minority students, HB 353 is a necessary first step to ensure college students can practice their religious belief and academic success.

Our office frequently receives religious accommodation requests from students, who feel that their rights are being infringed upon. Moreover, some complaints point to the challenges that students face when attempting to self-advocate through institutional bureaucracies. Also, we see the inequity presented when requests are left to the instructor or institution's discretion.

College and university officials must take responsibility to ensure the well-being and needs of all students on their campuses.

CAIR-Ohio urges the Committee to report this bill favorably. Thank you for your consideration.