

PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF:

Whitney Siddiqi

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IN SUPPORT OF:

HB 353: Testing Your Faith Act

House Higher Education & Career Readiness Committee

[Cincinnati, OH, 4/4/22] — Dear Chair Lanese, Vice Chair Young, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Higher Education and Career Readiness Committee. My name is Whitney Siddiqi and I am the Outreach and Government Affairs Director for the Ohio Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, known as CAIR-Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill 353.

Thank you as well to Rep. Miranda and Rep. Click 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.

It is only fitting to be submitting this testimony during Ramadan, a holy month of fasting, worship, and good deeds for Muslims, which ends with the Eid al-Fitr holiday. This month and the Eid holiday often require religious accommodations at school, work, and in other public spaces for our community. CAIR-Ohio supports Ohio Muslims in requesting those accommodations through self-advocacy tools and outreach.

We are consistently responding to questions and requests from Muslim college students around excused absences and late class work for Ramadan and other Islamic observances; space to pray on campus as Muslims pray five times per day; and other reasonable accommodation needs.

These accommodations are not just an important aspect of inclusive environments; rather, they are a necessity to practicing our faith free from discrimination.

As we see our Ohio Muslim community grow – including the number of Muslim students attending Ohio colleges and universities – so too does the need for religious accommodations. Our webpage dedicated to Ramadan resources, including our accommodation request letters, is the second-most visited page on our website. Just this quarter, we have had nearly 400 community members across Ohio download these resources.

In each of these requests, policies differ depending on the school, class, and professor. Often, class policies are rigid with mandatory attendance and a limited number of excused absences including sick days, beyond the schools' official holidays. Students should not have to choose their education over their faith or vice versa. We need a law that protects and provides a baseline of accommodation for every student.

While we must continue to do more to ensure equity for religious minority students, HB 353 is a necessary first step to ensuring college students can practice their religious beliefs while at the same time achieve academic success.

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