



Council on American-Islamic Relations, Ohio
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TO: SENATE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE
FROM: COUNCIL ON AMERICAN-ISLAMIC RELATIONS, OHIO CHAPTER
DATE: May 25, 2021
RE: SUPPORT FOR SB 181

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee – my name is Tala Dahbour and I am here as a representative of the Ohio Chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR-Ohio). CAIR is America’s largest civil liberties and advocacy organization for American Muslims. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to present proponent testimony on Senate Bill 181.

I would like to begin by to thanking Senator Gavarone for sponsoring this important legislation. Senator Gavarone introduced this bill in response to an issue experienced by Noor Abukaram, an Ohio student athlete who was disqualified from her track meet after running her fastest 5k for simply wearing a head covering, or hijab, as a form of religious expression. Noor’s story shed light on a common challenge faced by many students, especially Muslim students, who choose to wear clothing in accordance with their religious beliefs while participating in sports. No student should be prohibited from participating in school athletics for expressing their religious beliefs. This directly contradicts our values as a country. Senate Bill 181 would prevent similar instances from occurring by allowing athletes to participate in events while wearing items that reflect their religious beliefs. CAIR-Ohio supports this bill because it marks a significant step forward in advancing religious liberty in Ohio.

Sports and extra-curricular activities are an integral part of a student’s social and educational development. It is a pathway to make friends, develop a sense of identity, increase their college eligibility, and simply have fun. Excessively restrictive uniforms and dress codes, which exclude certain forms of religious expression, mean that students may be deterred or even prohibited from participating in school sports and extra-curricular activities. Therefore, they are less likely to reap the benefits of such programs.

Furthermore, the visibility and acceptance of Muslims and students of other religious minorities within interscholastic sports is an important step towards helping establish the integration of such students within the larger social fabric of Ohio schools. As a civil rights advocacy organization, we see this as a significant move towards protecting religious liberty within Ohio schools.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.

Tala Dahbour

CAIR-Ohio Representative