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TO: HOUSE EDUCATION AND CAREER READINESS COMMITTEE
FROM: COUNCIL ON AMERICAN-ISLAMIC RELATIONS, COLUMBUS, OHIO CHAPTER
DATE: October 30, 2017
RE: SUPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 360

Usjid Hameed, Public Affairs Coordinator for the Council on American-Islamic Relations Columbus, Ohio Chapter (CAIR-Columbus) presents this written testimony on behalf of CAIR-Columbus in support of House Bill 360.

Bullying in schools is a reality in America today. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, more than one out of every five students report being bullied. Along with causing immediate emotional and physical harm, bullying has long term mental consequences upon victims and increases the likelihood of clinical depression. Studies by researchers at Yale University indicate that victims of bullying were two to nine times more likely to report suicidal thoughts compared to children who were not bullied.

Unfortunately, Ohio is all too familiar with the effects of bullying. Earlier this year, 8-year-old Gabriel Taye in Cincinnati was terrorized by bullies to the point that he took his own life. His parents later filed a lawsuit against the school district for failing to address the issue of bullying for concealing evidence of other bullying incidents in that school district. Ohio must be a leader in tackling bullying to ensure that Gabriel's situation is never repeated.

HB 360 brings a firm and rehabilitation focused approach to prevent future incidences of bullying. The bill's requirement that the bully be offered counseling while serving his/her suspension aims to uncover and remedy the student's motivations for engaging in bullying.

Moreover, HB 360 mandates that the school district maintain a record verifying that the parent or guardian is notified of any incident of harassment, intimidation, or bullying. This is a very important provision of this Bill because a lot of parents are usually in the dark about their children being bullied in school.

In addition, HB 360 requires the superintendent of the school district to investigate any report of bullying, intimidation, or harassment by a school official or volunteer. When teachers bully students, it normalizes bullying and leads to more bullying by students. While this provision of HB 360 will protect all students, it will especially benefit American Muslim students in Ohio. According to a report by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, a quarter of all bullying incidents against Muslim students involve a school official or teacher.

For the above reasons, CAIR-Columbus urges committee members to vote in favor of HB 360.

Sincerest regards,

Usjid Hameed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Usjid Hameed', is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Public Affairs Coordinator
CAIR-Columbus