



Council on American-Islamic Relations, Ohio

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Good morning Chairman Coley and Committee members,

My name is Usjid Hameed and I am here on behalf of the Ohio Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-Ohio) to discuss why SB 317 is a dangerous piece of legislation and why everyone on this committee should vote no.

SB 317 would allow teachers to carry loaded guns in Ohio's elementary, middle and high schools, without completing the safety training currently required by state law. That puts the safety of all Ohio schoolchildren at risk, but it poses a particularly grave danger to the wellbeing of Muslim students and teachers in Ohio. This is because in the absence of statewide training and oversight, many Ohio School districts may choose to send their teachers to private training programs that traffic in gratuitous and dangerous racial and religious stereotyping.

FASTER Saves Lives is a prime example of such a training program. It was developed by the Buckeye Firearms Foundation and is marketed to Ohio school districts. Though it is not approved by any state agency or subject to any state oversight, it has received its own budget line twice in the state budget. FASTER has received over \$500,000 of our tax dollars. As of January 2020, FASTER claims to have trained more than 2,600 teachers and staff in 18 states, as well as in 79 of Ohio's 88 counties.

SB 317 would, in effect, green light school districts to send staff back to FASTER's private training. Before the Committee takes this path, it should be aware how dangerous this training is for Muslim students and teachers, and those of other religious and racial minority groups. The FASTER program includes what it terms "mindset training," which is meant to prepare school employees to shoot and kill an attacker who could be a student. During this "mindset training" FASTER uses religious and ethnic stereotyping to condition trainees to view Muslim students in particular as threats and to be prepared to use deadly force against them.

For example, despite acknowledging there has never been such an incident in a U.S. school, FASTER teaches that the most severe threat teachers and school staff face is what FASTER calls a "Level 3 Full Blown Terror Incident" committed by terrorists that happen to be Muslim. FASTER's training materials include a gratuitous review of these attacks worldwide, including in Russia, India, and Pakistan.

Additionally, FASTER teaches its trainees to fear Muslim students and staff, and to react to them with aggression and hostility. Trainees are taught that in the event of a terror attack “you will have to kill them,”—“them” meaning the Muslim student or staff member—because “they won’t give up or commit suicide.” If trainees fail to “Be aggressive” and “FIGHT”—i.e., shoot—a potential terrorist that is Muslim, FASTER warns that they “will be tortured and killed” if male, or “raped and killed” if female.

FASTER trainees are also taught to recognize the common Arabic phrase “Allahu Akbar” as the harbinger of a terrorist attack. “Allahu Akbar” simply means “God is most great” and is used by Muslims in prayers and as a general declaration of faith or thankfulness. It is simply an invocation of faith.

FASTER’s depictions of Muslims as terrorists in its training demonizes Arab and Muslim students and contributes to a misinformed understanding of Muslims and Arabs in the United States. Associating Muslims with violence in the manner FASTER does creates a toxic and dangerous environment for Muslim students that may lead to increased racial profiling and disciplinary action against them, and even death.

The passage of SB317 would clear the way for schools to send their employees to FASTER and/or other concerning training programs. At a time when Ohio lawmakers can and should be focused on how we will send teachers and students back to school safely in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, or how we can create a more equitable society for our black and brown citizens, it is a shame that we are here today instead discussing legislation that would undoubtedly push us closer to a more dangerous Ohio. There are a number of ways to keep our students safe in schools. This is not one of them. Please vote no on SB 317.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Usjid Hameed', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Usjid Hameed
Government Affairs and Development Director
CAIR-Ohio