



CAIR
MASSACHUSETTS



BLACK LIVES
MATTER

“O You Who Believe,
Stand firm for Justice
even against
your own selves,,



{Quran (4):135}

Standing Strong, Together.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations - Massachusetts

2020
annual report

Standing Strong, Together.

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

- 3 ❖ From Our Executive Director
- 4 ❖ Civil Rights
- 5 ❖ Government Affairs
- 7 ❖ Youth Advocacy
- 8 ❖ Financial Summary
- 9 ❖ Meet CAIR-Massachusetts:
About Our Organization,
Staff, & Board Members
- 11 ❖ How to Support Us
- 12 ❖ Acknowledgments



Our Principles

- ❖ CAIR is committed to **protecting the civil rights** of all Americans, regardless of faith.
- ❖ CAIR **supports domestic policies** that promote civil rights, diversity and freedom of religion.
- ❖ CAIR **opposes domestic policies** that limit civil rights, permit racial, ethnic or religious profiling, infringe on due process, or that prevent Muslims and others from participating fully in American civic life.
- ❖ CAIR is **a natural ally** of groups, religious or secular, that advocate justice and human rights in America and around the world.
- ❖ CAIR **supports foreign policies** that help create free and equitable trade, encourage human rights and promote representative government based on socio-economic justice.
- ❖ CAIR **believes the active practice of Islam strengthens** the social and religious fabric of our nation.
- ❖ CAIR **condemns all acts of violence** against civilians by any individual, group or state.
- ❖ CAIR **advocates dialogue** between faith communities both in America and worldwide.
- ❖ CAIR **supports equal and complementary rights and responsibilities** for men and women.

Dear Friends & Supporters,

Asalamu Alaykum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatu.

When the Prophet Mohammed (may peace and blessings be upon him) emigrated to the city of Medina, he did so during a period of intense strife, personal affliction, and uncertainty. His community was fractured, and he was wading into a new environment that would doubtlessly be full of challenges. Famously, his first response was turning to remembrance of Allah and devotion: using his own hands, he led the construction of a mosque in which his community could worship.

However, what he did next in this new and fraught environment, and the project to which he arguably dedicated the rest of his life, receives far less attention in most narratives: building, strengthening, empowering, and uniting the nascent Muslim community into a global force for good.

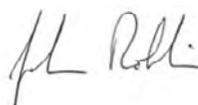
The past year has brought unique challenges for each one of us, but the presence of difficulty, and its twin, opportunity, is nothing new. And just as our beloved Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) manifested his devotion during periods of struggle through both prayer and action, so too our chapter has continued in our mandate to faithfully empower and defend our community. The need has not ceased for our work of building and strengthening Muslims in our area, but our commitment remains steadfast.

Thanks to your support in 2020, we were able to:

- ❖ Field and assist with over **245 civil rights intakes**
- ❖ **File lawsuits** against biased employers, housing authorities, and major corporations to ensure our community's safety
- ❖ Host the **third annual Muslim Youth Leadership Program virtually** to empower the next generation of our community's leaders
- ❖ Contact over 10,000 Massachusetts Muslims through our **Get Out the Muslim Vote** program
- ❖ Encourage over 5,000 Massachusetts Muslims to complete the **2020 federal census**
- ❖ Conduct **over two dozen press events and media interviews**
- ❖ **Advocate for our community** among local, state, and federal elected officials

We're grateful daily for the support of our community, donors, foundations, and mosque leaders for enabling us to continue standing up for the rights of Muslims in Massachusetts. It's because of each of you that we were able, during this incredibly difficult year, to continue to serve, support, and defend the Muslim community here in Massachusetts.

Sincerely,



Dr. John Robbins,
CAIR-MA Executive Director

Civil Rights

In 2020 we received **174 requests for legal assistance**, a 27% decrease from 2019. Calls started to taper off by March, as COVID-19 forced schools and offices to move online, and many people stayed home. The impact was clear in certain areas: we received only one school bullying call the entire year and travel abuse complaints dropped off. Unfortunately, during the third quarter we saw a significant spike in family law calls (an area of law that we don't handle, but instead offer referrals), a trend that was noted across all demographic groups.

But even as numbers fell, the percentage of calls for the other areas of law that we handle were fairly consistent. Cases concerning hate crimes and harassment made up 7% of our cases, continuing a decline of one percentage point each year for the past four years – a welcome decline if only a slight one. This year, however, the location of an **incident was more likely to be at or near the victim's home**, where people were spending much of their time.



- ❖ In May, we obtained a **court order to protect a Muslim couple and their young children** from their next-door neighbor, who had waged a campaign of Islamophobic and anti-immigrant harassment and intimidation for over a year, culminating in an assault on the Muslim father.
- ❖ Over the summer, we represented a Muslim woman whose **car was vandalized with huge spray-painted swastikas**. We also offered a reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the perpetrator.

We also handled employment issues (including the need for equipment to protect workers from COVID), travel abuses at airports and the border, FBI harassment, discrimination in housing, education, and places of public accommodation, and prisoners' religious freedoms.

For a more complete description of our legal work, please see our **2020 Civil Rights Report**: cairma.org/civilrights



Voter education

We issued a **Voter Guide** for the primary elections, and then an updated [CAIR-MA Voter Guide](#) for the general election, listing the final candidates. We helped educate Massachusetts Muslims about the major issues facing our state and the nation, and to increase Muslim engagement with elected officials.

The guide included:

- ❖ How to vote
- ❖ When to vote
- ❖ Elected offices and responsibilities
- ❖ General election candidates
- ❖ Ballot questions
- ❖ Sample ballot

We co-hosted with [JETPAC](#) a webinar on the **ballot questions** voters were able to decide.

Get out the vote!

We made sure that Massachusetts Muslims had the information they needed to make their voices heard. We **publicized the dates** for voter registration deadlines, primary elections, and the general election, and who to call for help if voters ran into problems. Moving beyond “phone banking” of the past, we used “text banking,” which allowed us to send text messages to **10,000 registered voters** with important election reminders. Given the huge surge in **mail-in ballots**, we co-hosted a second webinar with JETPAC, this one on voting by mail.

And when Election Day finally arrived, we joined CAIR National’s **live election coverage**.

Pushing back against face recognition technology

We joined with other civil rights and civil liberties groups in **opposing the use of face recognition technology** (also known as biometric surveillance technology) by law enforcement agencies. Too often this technology is used to track people who lawfully exercise their First Amendment rights in public settings, such as at protests. But it’s even worse for communities of color, because the results are not accurate. A MIT study found that for darker skinned women, facial analysis programs had an error rate of up to 35%, compared to a 0.8% error rate for light skinned men. In other words, **the technology has built-in racial bias**.

- ❖ We testified before the Boston City Council in favor of a bill to **ban the use of facial recognition** software by the City of Boston: “Rather than investing limited resources in facial surveillance technology, Massachusetts should be focusing on creating services to nurture their relationship with underserved communities.” We are happy to report that the bill passed unanimously.
- ❖ We submitted testimony to the state Legislature’s Judiciary Committee in favor of a bill to **put on hold the use of face recognition technology** in Massachusetts until proper regulation is in place to protect the public from racial disparities and the invasion of privacy. Unfortunately, the bill was never voted on but we expect this will remain a live issue in the Legislature.

Government Affairs, continued on the next page >>

The Justice Workshop

In the spring, we created a series of **interactive webinars** to offset the inability to gather together due to the COVID quarantine, especially during Ramadan. We focused on the themes of justice, community organizing, coalition building, and civic engagement, with the **goal of building skill sets needed for organizing and leadership both within and beyond the Muslim community.**



- ❖ **Queen-Cheyenne Wade** – We kicked off our series with local Muslim organizer and educator (and former CAIR-MA intern) Queen-Cheyenne Wade. Ms. Wade was later named a “2020 Bostonian of the Year” by the Boston Globe.
- ❖ **Newburyport City Councilor Afroz Khan** – We were delighted to host a conversation with second-term City Councilor Afroz Khan about lessons learned from running for elective office as a Muslim woman.
- ❖ **Civil Disobedience** – This webinar covered the history of dissent in the U.S., from the Boston Tea Party to the outcry over the police murder of George Floyd, as well as the Islamic duty to seek justice.
- ❖ **Introduction to Community Organizing** – Successful organizing campaigns of the past, such as the Farmworkers Movement and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, offered powerful lessons on creating systemic change by means of collective action led by those directly impacted.
- ❖ **The Rights of Protesters** – To assist those taking part in BLM demonstrations, the Massachusetts chapter of the National Lawyers Guild offered a private training for young Muslims about their rights at demonstrations, the legal process, and how best to protect themselves.
- ❖ **Juneteenth** – On June 19, 1865, slaves in Texas learned that President Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation two years earlier, abolishing slavery, and that the Civil War had ended. We discussed the legacy of slavery and segregation in the U.S., wealth inequality and the call for reparations, and how we can support the BLM movement.

The 2020 Census

This year presented a once-in-decade opportunity for an accurate count of Massachusetts residents, which is used to decide **how much funding the state receives** for schools, roads, hospitals, firefighters, and resources for people who need them most. At first, we were concerned because the previous Administration wanted to include questions about citizenship and immigration status – an obvious attempt to intimidate immigrants, even if that would result in a flawed data. But when the courts said those questions could not be used, our work started in earnest.

With funding from the Massachusetts Census Equity Fund, we hired a **Census Coordinator** to reach out to Muslim households that might be hesitant to participate. We joined the #MassCounts campaign, which focused on historically undercounted communities. We promoted #CensusDay (April 1) and the **census webinar** for Muslims created by CAIR-California, CAIR-Washington, and MPower. We also made sure our community knew about the October 15th deadline for filling out the census, which had been up in the air due to mixed messages at the federal level.

This year, we welcomed our **new Youth Advocacy Coordinator**, Fatuma Mohamed, and among her projects were to build intentional relationships with masjid youth groups to learn about community needs and issues.

Muslim Youth Leadership Project

The pandemic may have changed the format of our third annual Muslim Youth Leadership Project for high school students, but it didn't dampen the enthusiasm of our **35 participants**. We swapped out the intensive four-day in-person gathering of past years for **remote sessions spread over three weeks**, for three days a week, two hours a day. As it turned out, this new approach allowed for more preparation and reflection between sessions as well as participation from students who may have been unable to travel to Boston.

This year we focused on **four key skill sets needed to build positive change** within the Muslim community:

- ❖ Grassroots community organizing
- ❖ Coalition building
- ❖ Civic engagement
- ❖ Media literacy

The curriculum consisted of assigned readings, group discussions, guest speakers, and films/documentaries. At the end of each week, **MYLP participants presented on various topics** in order to teach one another that, even as young people, knowledge exists within their own lived experiences.



Bullying survey

As first reported last year, we designed a survey for Muslim public school students in grades 7 to 12 to gather reliable data about the extent to which Muslim youth are harassed, bullied, or even assaulted in school. **With help from 15 high school students who spread the word** about the survey and area mosques that graciously allowed us to set up survey sites, **nearly 200 Muslim students completed the survey**. The initial results are striking:

- ❖ 61% of Muslim students have experienced religious-based bullying
- ❖ 52% of students have experienced bullying based on their ethnicity or race
- ❖ 17% of students have experienced physical harassment at school such as having their hijab pulled on or removed entirely
- ❖ 33% of Muslim students have altered their appearance, behavior, or names to hide the fact that they are Muslim
- ❖ 14% of students do not feel comfortable letting others know that they are Muslim at all

We will release our final report in the first half of this year, which we anticipate serving as a catalyst for legislation and best practices.

Youth Advocacy, continued on the next page >>

Muslim Organizing and Advocacy Conference

We spent a good part of 2020 planning our first-ever conference Muslim Organizing and Advocacy conference for **college students, organizers, and community members**, which will be held on February 13th, 2021. We invited young Muslim activists to help us design the event to ensure that we meet community needs and build a radically inclusive space in which we can build power through community healing, popular education, and an Islamic understanding of justice and power. When COVID hit, we were forced to pare down our initial plans for a three-day convening at a local university to a one-day online event. We also revamped the agenda to three workshops: **Organizing 101, Challenging Anti-Blackness in the Muslim Community, and Art & Healing**.



Youth Advisory Committee

This year, we established the first CAIR-MA Youth Advisory Committee. We will be **welcoming our first cohort of advisory committee members in March**. We are excited to welcome Young leaders in our community who are passionate about making a difference. They will be playing a central role in the strategic planning of the Youth Advocacy department.

Financial Summary

CAIR-Massachusetts is an efficiently run, high-performance nonprofit organization. In 2020, our fifth full year of operations, we successfully raised **\$528,000 to support the Massachusetts Muslim community**.

Over 90% of these donations were from local donors in Massachusetts and New England, while the remainder were from local nonprofits and mosques eager to support our work, as well as from donors across the United States. **100% of CAIR-MA's income is and has always been domestic**. The average donation to CAIR-MA in 2020 was \$245, but we also saw gifts of \$1 per month by dedicated supporters. Finally, we're grateful to have been the **recipients of a grant from the Hyams Foundation, and are in year three of our cycle as winners of a Cummings Foundation \$100k for 100 award**.

Meet CAIR-Massachusetts

CAIR-Massachusetts is a nonprofit 501(c)(3), grassroots civil rights and advocacy organization and is a chapter of The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). **CAIR is America's largest Muslim advocacy and civil liberties organization**, with 35 regional offices nationwide. The national headquarters is located on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

CAIR-MA was incorporated in June of 2015 by a core group of dedicated local Muslim leaders who saw the need for greater representation and defense of their community. Since its incorporation, the chapter has grown to four full-time staff, and has assisted hundreds of Muslims in their pursuit of justice.



Our Vision

To be a **leading advocate** for justice and mutual understanding.

Our Mission

To enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote **justice and mutual understanding in Massachusetts**.

Our Staff



Nazia Ashraful, MPH, Government Affairs Director. Nazia Ashraful is a committed advocate and organizer for minority populations and women's rights. She was formerly the Legislative Affairs Coordinator of NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts, where she focused on government relations. She has a sound understanding of the inner workings of the Massachusetts State House and the necessary steps to turn a community concern into a solution in the form of a law on the Governor's desk. Ms. Ashraful holds a Masters of Public Health from Boston University where she specialized in minority women's reproductive health, and a bachelor from Drake University, where she was President of the Muslim Students Association.

Barbara Dougan, Esq., Civil Rights Director. Barbara Dougan brings over 20 years of experience as a civil rights attorney in Boston. She was formerly Director of the Project to Combat Racial Violence at the Boston Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, representing the victims of hate crimes, police misconduct, and discrimination in housing and public accommodations. Most recently, she ran the Massachusetts office of Families Against Mandatory Minimums, whereas the Massachusetts Project Director her legislative advocacy helped to reform harsh drug sentencing laws that

Barbara's bio, continued on the next page >>



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overwhelmingly impacted minority communities. She was one of the organizers of a 9/11 legal response network in conjunction with the American Immigration Lawyers Association, the ACLU, and National Lawyers Guild, where she presented Know Your Rights talks at mosques and developed attorney referral lists and a help hotline. Along with a team of attorneys, she litigated one of the first post-9/11 airline cases (*Alshrafi v. American Airlines*) on behalf of a US citizen from Jordan. In 2010, Ms. Dougan was named one of the “Top Women in Law” by Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly and has been honored by the NAACP, National Lawyers Guild, Community Change, and Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston.

Fatuma Mohamed, Youth Advocacy Officer. Fatuma Mohamed is a committed community organizer and youth advocate passionate about contributing to the creation of a just and equitable society. She graduated from Northeastern University with a major in Political Science/International Affairs and minors in African Studies, History, and Women’s and Gender Studies. As a high school student, Fatuma served as a youth organizer for Boston Mobilization, working on various campaigns such as the campaign to increase the minimum wage in Massachusetts. Her passion for community organizing followed her into college where she served as Vice President and campaign leader for Students Against Institutionalized Discrimination (SAID), advocating for increased culturally competent mental health services for students from marginalized communities, among other projects. Fatuma is also passionate about research, and has previously conducted research on Environmental Justice and water system sustainability as well as a thesis project on the experience of Boston Somali youth with policing and surveillance. Additionally, Fatuma has served as an organizer for Hormar Academy, a mentorship program for Somali High School students in the Greater Boston Area, working to address barriers of access to higher education faced by first-generation low-income immigrant students. Fatuma is inspired by all the freedom fighters before her.



Dr. John Robbins, Executive Director. Dr. John Robbins is the Founding Executive Director of the Massachusetts chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest Muslim civil rights organization in the United States. His office has jurisdiction over more than 120,000 Muslims in the Commonwealth. He has made over 100 TV and radio appearances, and his writings have appeared in numerous outlets including *Fortune*, *Time*, *Muslim Matters*, *the Hill*, *the Jewish Journal*, *the Boston Globe*, *the Boston Herald*, and *the Huffington Post*. He received his Ph.D. in Literature from Cornell University at the age of 27, and completed postdoctoral fellowships at Tufts University and the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Robbins sits on the board of directors of Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, the greater Boston area’s oldest interfaith social justice network.

Our Board Members

Tahirah Amatul-Wadud is a litigator licensed to practice in Massachusetts state and federal courts, as well as the federal court in the Northern District of New York. Her practice areas are civil rights and domestic relations law. She is general counsel for a New York Muslim congregation, regularly develops and chairs continuing education courses for legal professionals and members of the non-legal community, sits on a panel for her local bar association, and has served on boards for Western Massachusetts non-profit organizations. Ms. Amatul-Wadud is also an appointed volunteer commissioner for the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women.

Mouaad Lebeche is a Civil Engineer by trade, specializing in Multi-Family/Commercial Construction. A life-long resident of the South Shore, he has spent the past 17 years serving his local Muslim community at the Islamic Center of New England. He began volunteering for various committees at age 16, and has now been serving as a member of its Board of Directors for the past 5+ years. Coupling technical skills with a widely developing network, Mouaad is committed to justice for those in need and protecting their civil, American rights.

The **Rev. Corey J. Sanderson** is the minister of The Second Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Greenfield Massachusetts. Corey is past

President and a member of The Interfaith Council of Franklin County and has worked closely with a number of area social service organizations such as The Literacy Project, The Communities That Care Coalition, and The Opioid Task Force. On the state level, he currently serves as the chair of the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ, the largest Protestant denomination in the state. For the past twelve years, Corey has been an adjunct instructor at Northwestern Michigan College where he has taught Philosophy, Ethics, and Religious Studies courses, both in the classroom and online. Corey is interested in fostering a healthy religiously diverse democracy in our country and finding places where the three Abrahamic faiths can work together on issues that affect the common good.

Zahid Siddiqui is a Braintree native working for Pricewaterhouse Coopers in Boston as a corporate tax CPA. He completed his Masters in Taxation from Northeastern University in Boston, MA and his Bachelors in Accounting from Bryant University in Smithfield, RI. He has been working in the accounting industry for over 10 years, specializing on the reporting of business income taxes to regulatory agents such as the SEC and IRS. He serves as the CFO for the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center in Roxbury, MA. He is also the co-founder of the Fasting 5K, a charity run during Ramadan for underprivileged children.

How to Support Us

Show Your Support

- ❖ Sign up for our **mailing list**: www.cairma.org
- ❖ Follow us on **Facebook**: www.facebook.com/cairmassachusetts
- ❖ Follow us on **Twitter**: www.twitter.com/cairmass

Give Your Time

- ❖ **Volunteer** your talents: www.cairma.org/employment
- ❖ **Intern** with CAIR-MA: e-mail info@ma.cair.com

Financial Contributions

Make a general donation to support our legal & advocacy work at www.cairma.org

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Acknowledgments

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Interns & Coordinators



Shaye Anis, Muslim Youth Leadership Program Intern



Iman Khan & Queen-Cheyenne Wade, Muslim Organizing and Advocacy conference interns

Najma Khatri, Census Coordinator (*not pictured*)

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- ❖ The Boston Foundation
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- ❖ The Hyams Foundation
- ❖ Massachusetts Census Equity Fund



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