



CAIR
MASSACHUSETTS



Creating Our Future

The Council on American-Islamic Relations - Massachusetts

2021
annual report

Creating Our Future

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

On the cover: This image of a **CAIR-MA Youth Advisory Committee** meeting sums up our work in 2021: carrying on despite the pandemic while uplifting Muslim youth. [Read more on page 7.](#)

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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.



From Our Executive Director

To Our Friends & Supporters

Like many around the world, for our staff and board, things changed drastically in 2021.

Early in the year, our chapter's founder and president, Ms. Sarfraz Nistar, and our founding executive director, Dr. John Robbins, transitioned from CAIR-MA to other important work.

When Sarfraz stepped down, I became board president, tasked with creating and leading an ambitious transition plan. Little did I know how my own life and career trajectory would radically shift as the year went on.

Today I write to you as the executive director and chief legal officer of CAIR-MA. I went from volunteer board member to full-time staff member so that I may dedicate myself to seeing our organization through the execution of our mission and vision.

Our legal department, led by attorney Barbara J. Dougan, provides a vital service to our community. People come to us because they trust our expertise to navigate them through the legal issues presented because of their Muslim identities.

Our youth coordinator, Fatuma Mohamed, creates popular leadership programs and opportunities for our young people. Guiding American Muslim students in the art of self-advocacy is contributing to a more inclusive world for all.

We remain grateful to our donors, funders, volunteers, and interns who make our work possible. We are grateful to the many people who trust us to work with and for them.

I'm looking forward to the future.

In strength,

Tahirah Amatul-Wadud, Esq.
CAIR-MA Executive Director & Chief Legal Officer

Thanks to your support in 2021, we were able to:

- ❖ Respond to 163 requests for legal assistance, surpassing the milestone of 1,000 such requests since the CAIR-MA Legal Department was created in late 2016
- ❖ File discrimination claims against Islamophobic employers, advocate for victims of anti-Muslim harassment, and protect the religious rights of Muslim prisoners
- ❖ Issue Massachusetts' first-ever report on the bullying of Muslim youth
- ❖ Convene our first Muslim Organizing and Advocacy Conference for Muslim college students and young professionals
- ❖ Provide a platform for the skills and enthusiasm of our Youth Advisory Committee, which helps us empower the next generation of our community's leaders
- ❖ Host our fourth annual Muslim Youth Leadership Program for Muslim high school students
- ❖ Meet with lawmakers to discuss the needs of the Muslim community
- ❖ Educate the public and serve as a media resource on Muslim issues

Implementing Our Vision

Leadership change

This was a year of both fond farewells and exciting hellos for CAIR-MA. Dr. John Robbins, our founding Executive Director, announced that he was leaving to take on a new role serving the Muslim community for another organization. Founding president of the chapter, Sarfraz Nistar, transitioned from the organization in early 2021. We are enormously grateful to Dr. Robbins and Ms. Nistar for their vision, leadership, and service since the founding of CAIR-MA in 2015. Tahirah Amatul-Wadud, Esq., who was a CAIR-MA board member (Vice-President then President from 2021 to 2022) applied for and accepted the role of [Executive Director](#) and Chief Legal Officer in early 2022. Attorney Amatul-Wadud brings to CAIR-MA her passion for defending the rights of American Muslims, her legal skills as a highly-respected attorney, and her experience as a board member overseeing CAIR-MA's restructuring and rapid advancement.

Strategic planning

In 2021, we worked closely with a team of consultants to create a detailed strategic and operations plan to ensure that CAIR-MA is well-positioned to enter the next phase of our development. The impending leadership changes were a significant component of that planning. Our consultants sought input from community stakeholders, staff, donors, board members, other CAIR chapters, and CAIR's national office. They also looked at the role of CAIR-MA in relation to other Muslim organizations. In order to ensure long-term sustainability and viability, the board adopted a final plan that prioritizes strengthening our infrastructure for the next three years. Specifically, to:

- ❖ Expand board and volunteer contributions
- ❖ Strengthen board governance systems
- ❖ Maintain and expand fundraising and development
- ❖ Strengthen staff operations



Civil Rights Advocacy



In 2021, we surpassed a major milestone: CAIR-MA has now received **over 1,000 requests for help since late 2016**, when we created our Legal Department. In 2021, 163 people requested legal advice or representation. This was the second year in a row that we saw a drop in calls compared to pre-COVID years, when we averaged about 240 calls annually.

Calls about hate crimes and harassment continue to decrease each year, from 28 cases in 2017 to nine in 2021. On the other hand, bullying and education discrimination cases jumped back up to pre-pandemic numbers in the fall, when many schools returned to in-person classes. In terms of specific cases:

- ❖ COVID was often interwoven with religious issues in the workplace. We filed a discrimination case on behalf of a Muslim professional whose employer appears to have used the pandemic as an excuse to get rid of its only Muslim employee. Another employer agreed to maintain a religious accommodation for a returning worker so he could avoid handling alcohol. We also advised state employees on the status of religious exemptions to the Governor's vaccine mandate.
- ❖ The Mass. Department of Correction tentatively agreed to change its statewide policy which previously barred monetary gifts by prisoners. Muslim prisoners will now be able to pay *zakat* (make charitable donations), which is one of the five pillars of Islam.

In addition, we handled cases of Islamophobic harassment by neighbors, abusive treatment at stores and public facilities, police misconduct, FBI harassment, egregious mistreatment when traveling, and housing discrimination. For a more complete description of the legal issues that Massachusetts Muslims face, and our efforts on their behalf, please see our [2021 Civil Rights Report: cairma.org/civilrights](https://cairma.org/civilrights).

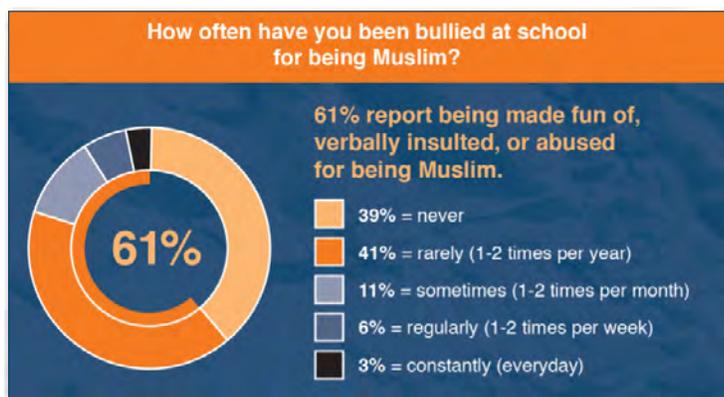


Massachusetts' first-ever report on Islamophobic bullying

CAIR-MA issued the state's first report documenting the extent to which Muslim youth are bullied at school, "Bullying Report of Massachusetts Muslim Youth: [Standing Up and Speaking Out](#)," which received national [media coverage](#). The report, based on our 2019-2020 survey of Muslim students in grades 6 to 12, found that:

- ❖ Over 60% of those surveyed reported being bullied at school due to their Muslim identity
- ❖ About 17% reported physical harassment, including having their hijabs pulled on
- ❖ Almost one-third altered their appearance, behavior, or names to hide the fact that they are Muslim

The report also included information on the psychological harm caused by bullying, Massachusetts' anti-bully law, practical strategies and legal tools to protect children, and needed policy changes.



Muslim Youth Leadership Program

Our fourth annual Muslim Youth Leadership Program (MYLP), for students in 9th through 12th grade, convened over a four-week period this past summer. Each week was focused on a key skills set: media literacy, civic engagement, community organizing, and coalition building. Our young people had the opportunity to learn from local Muslims working in media, government, and grassroots community organizing.

Like 2020, we held the program virtually, which made it possible to incorporate a new structure. We launched our first collaborative programming with the City School's Summer Leadership Program, the Center to Support Immigrant Organizing, and African Community Economic Development of New England (ACEDONE)'s Youth Ubuntu Project. Our young people came together to share what they were learning in their respective programs. They also participated in workshops about facilitation training, introduction to community organizing, and case studies on local and national coalitions.

On our final day, MYLP participants shared presentations on issues they were passionate about, such as climate change / environmental

justice, fighting racial injustice within the judicial system, and combating the bullying of Muslim youth in school. They incorporated the different tools they learned, such as op-ed writing and power mapping, in their presentations.

Youth Advocacy, continued on the next page >>

Youth Advisory Committee

In 2021, we welcomed our first cohort of Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) members, a diverse group of young Muslims, ages 14 to 21, from across the Commonwealth. They worked closely with our Youth Advocacy Coordinator in the strategic planning of CAIR-MA's youth advocacy work, while also developing their leadership skills.



Getting off to an impressive start, YAC members created a five-episode series of podcasts, “Talk Muslim to Me,” to amplify the voices of young Muslims, inspire change, and encourage young Muslims to be unapologetically Muslim in America. As the podcast intro says, “Through our stories, we hope you hear your voice. Because it matters. We matter.” You can [watch the entire series here](#) or [listen to it here](#).

- ❖ Episode 1, [Intersectionality](#): How we define intersectionality, what our identities mean to us as young American Muslims, and how we center Islam and our *deen* (religion) in our identities and activism.
- ❖ Episode 2, [Untold Muslim History](#): What we didn't learn in school and how the American educational system fails to teach about Islam and Muslims.
- ❖ Episode 3, [Faith During Difficult Times](#): Our struggles during the pandemic and other periods when our Iman suffers, what keeps us strong, and when to seek help.
- ❖ Episode 4, [Da'Wah ft. Br. Hamzah Henshaw](#): Br. Hamzah Henshaw, Dean of Students at Al-Noor Academy, talks about his experience as a revert to Islam, the *da'wah* (inviting others to learn about Islam) he was given and gave, and our own experiences with *da'wah* as young Muslims.
- ❖ Episode 5, [Misrepresentation](#): The importance and realities of representation of Muslims in the U.S., and the effects on both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Muslim Organizing and Advocacy Conference

After months of planning, in 2021 CAIR-MA hosted the first annual Muslim Organizing and Advocacy Conference, organized in collaboration with Muslim college students and young professionals. The goal of the conference was to build a radically inclusive space for Muslim-identifying students, organizers, and community members, aimed at building power through community healing, popular education, and an Islamic understanding of justice and power. The conference focused on three topics: Relational Organizing, Challenging and Healing from Anti-Blackness, and Bringing Imagination to Reality.

We received very positive feedback from those who attended. They felt energized by the workshops, liked how the conference had given them a space that they needed, and had gained new insights to bring back to their respective communities. Going forward, we will hold an informal gathering for participants to strengthen their relationships and to begin building the leadership team for future conferences.

Annual Gala

In October, we held our 7th annual gala, “Inspired by Faith, Leading by Service.” Although the pandemic again forced us to gather remotely, our impressive speakers still inspired the audience. Ustadah [Yasmin Mogahed](#) (pictured at right), internationally acclaimed author, speaker, and the first female instructor for AlMaghrib Institute, gave the keynote address. Motivational speaker [Dr. Altaf Husain](#), an assistant professor at Howard University, helped us exceed our fundraising goals as generous donors pledged \$138,000. [Watch the full program here.](#)



Community Outreach & Education

We greatly enjoy sharing our knowledge with and learning how we can be of service to professional and community groups. We look forward returning to our pre-pandemic level of training and “know your rights” events as restrictions are eased.

- ❖ As a follow-up to the release of our school bullying report, we co-presented with Muslim Justice League at two workshops at the statewide conference held by the Mass. Teachers Association.
- ❖ The Diversity Council at the Mass. Department of Revenue invited us to participate in a program about hate crimes, to educate its employees about the experiences of Muslims in Massachusetts and how to support targeted communities.
- ❖ We met with 11th grade students at Salem Academy Charter School to discuss Islamophobia and CAIR-MA’s work.
- ❖ For Black History Month, we spoke to Boston Latin School’s Muslim Student Association about the history of Black Muslims in America.
- ❖ At a Friday halaqa for the Islamic Society of Western Massachusetts’ youth group, we led “get to know you” and team-building activities.



Government Affairs

Making a good bill better

Joining with our friends at [JETPAC](#) (which recruits and trains Muslim candidates to run for elected office) and [Muslim Justice League](#), we met with the sponsors of a bill before the Mass. Legislature that would create a statewide Commission for Anti-Racism and Equity in Education. The bill calls for representatives of various religious and racial groups to be appointed to the Commission, but left out the Muslim community. The legislators agreed to correct this oversight.

Keeping an eye on facial recognition technology

CAIR-MA submitted testimony to the Legislature's Facial Recognition Commission, urging lawmakers to strengthen the state's facial recognition law to protect the privacy and safety of all Massachusetts residents. Muslims know all too well how seemingly neutral policies and technologies have been weaponized to target our community. The harm caused goes beyond "just" the invasion of privacy as innocent people go about their daily lives in public places. It can also wreak havoc on the lives of those falsely or unfairly seen as representing a threat to public safety due to nothing more than their religion, race, or national origin.

2021 Financial Summary

CAIR-Massachusetts is an efficiently run, high-performance nonprofit organization. In 2021, our sixth full year of operations, we successfully raised \$500,000 to support our work on behalf of the Massachusetts Muslim community. Well 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 U.S.

100% of CAIR-MA's income is and has always been domestic. The average donation to CAIR-MA in 2021 was \$290, but we also saw gifts of \$1 per month by dedicated supporters. 2021 was our fourth and final year of support as a "100 for 100k" grantee from the Cummings Foundation. We also received generous support from The Boston Foundation and the Hyams Foundation. Finally, the Rahman Family Internship Fund provided funding for our Muslim Youth Leadership Project intern.





Visibility and credibility

When the media have questions about New England events or issues concerning Muslims, they turn to CAIR-MA. In 2021, we conducted dozens of press and media interviews on topics such as Islamophobic hate crimes, bullying, and political engagement.

Standing with other faiths during troubled times

It is critical for those who commit hate crimes to hear that they do not speak for the larger community.

- ❖ CAIR-MA publicly condemned antisemitic vandalism at a synagogue and Jewish day school in Framingham, declaring, “Desecration of any house of worship is always appalling, but especially so in this instance as our Jewish neighbors are celebrating the high holy days of Judaism.”
- ❖ We also spoke out against vandalism at historic Black churches in Everett and Springfield, stating, “We are appalled by these acts of bigotry and racism against our Christian neighbors. Muslims are currently observing the holy month of Ramadan, during which we are enjoined to stand in solidarity with all who are confronted by hate.”

Supermarket Project

While monthly supermarket advertising circulars routinely include messages for Easter, Christmas, Hanukkah, and Passover, they have not traditionally recognized Muslim holidays. Thanks to a group of dedicated volunteers, CAIR-MA’s Supermarket Project has successfully encouraged leading supermarket chains in New England to include holiday wishes for Muslims. It may not seem like much, but based on market shares, we estimate that these message now reach over 10 million households throughout the region. Muslims are validated as part of the community, while non-Muslims are reminded that their neighbors are celebrating important religious holidays.



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.

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

Tahirah Amatul-Wadud, Executive Director & Chief Legal Officer.

Tahirah Amatul-Wadud is a respected attorney based in Springfield, Massachusetts with over 16 years of experience in corporate, family, and civil rights law. A former staff attorney with Western Massachusetts Community Legal Aid before entering private practice, she served as a commissioner with the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women from 2014-2020. In 2016, she rose to national prominence serving as the principal attorney on behalf of the residents of Islamburg, New York against Robert Duggart, an anti-Muslim conspiracy theorist who had planned a violent attack against the community. More recently, in 2018 she ran for U.S. Congress in Massachusetts' first district, securing 30% of the vote. Ms. Amatul-Wadud is active in the Western Massachusetts interfaith community and serves on nonprofit executive boards and committees throughout the region. In recognition of her service, she was named a "Top Woman of Law" by Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly, and in 2021 she received the prestigious Massachusetts Bar Association Community Service Award. She served as the Vice-President of the Board of Directors at CAIR-Massachusetts from 2016-2018 and its President from 2018-2021, and during her tenure has overseen the organization's restructuring and rapid growth. Ms. Amatul-Wadud is a graduate of Western New England University School of Law (2005) and Elms College cum laude (1998). She identifies as an African American Muslim woman, and is a proud married mother of seven.



Our Staff, continued on the next page >>



Barbara J. Dougan, Esq., Legal Director. Barbara J. Dougan brings over 30 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, where as the Massachusetts Project Director her legislative advocacy helped to reform harsh drug sentencing laws that 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 Coordinator. 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, Ms. Mohamed 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. Ms. Mohamed 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, Ms. Mohamed 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. Ms. Mohamed is inspired by all the freedom fighters before her.



Our Board Members

The **Rev. Corey J. Sanderson (President)** 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.

Raheela Rahman (Vice-President) is a Massachusetts attorney specializing in small business and intellectual property law. Her practice is focused on helping small businesses and startups through all stages of growth. She obtained her J.D. as well as her certificate in media and technology law from the Franklin Pierce Law School. Raheela is passionate about civil rights, public policy, and social justice.

Mouaad Lebeche (Secretary) 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.

Zahid Siddiqui (Treasurer) 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 in 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.

Our Interns



Fahima Begum, Harvard College
CAIR-MA Youth Advisory Committee



Mahdi Hamad, Harvard College
CAIR-MA Muslim Youth Leadership Program

Acknowledgments

We couldn't do it without you! CAIR-MA is profoundly grateful to the many people and organizations that make it possible for us to serve Massachusetts' Muslim community. We are especially grateful for major financial support from:

The Boston Foundation

The Cummings Foundation

The Hyams Foundation



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 Instagram: www.instagram.com/CAIRmass
- ❖ Follow us on Twitter: www.twitter.com/CAIRmass

Give Your Time

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

Financial Contributions

Make a general donation to support our legal and advocacy work at www.cairma.org/donate

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- ❖ The CAIR-Massachusetts team thanks Catherine A. Wheeler (Incantare Effect, LLC) for design & layout of this annual report! Her design portfolio is available at: www.incantare-effect.com