

In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.
All praise and thanks belong to God, the Lord of the Worlds.
May peace and prayers be upon Prophet Muhammad and his family.



Council on American-Islamic Relations
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Chairman Phil Mendelson
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW,
Washington, D.C. 20004

RE: Submitted Written Testimony of CAIR National Executive Director Nihad Awad in Support of Bill 24-22, Jamal Khashoggi Way Designation Act of 2021

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Councilmembers:

My name is Nihad Awad and I am the National Executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and a friend of the late Jamal Khashoggi. I write in support of Bill 24-22, the Jamal Khashoggi Way Designation Act of 2021, which would symbolically honor the memory and legacy of D.C. city resident, Washington Post columnist, free speech champion, and democracy activist Jamal Khashoggi, by designating New Hampshire Avenue N.W., between Virginia Avenue N.W. and F Street, N.W., in Ward 2, as "Jamal Khashoggi Way."

I personally commend Councilmembers Brooke Pinto, Elissa Silverman, Charles Allen, Brianne Nadeau, Christina Henderson, Vincent Gray, Mary Cheh, and Chairman Mendelson for their co-sponsorship of this historic measure. I also thank the other Councilmembers that have voiced support for Bill 24-22.

For the past 27 years, CAIR, the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, has been headquartered in Washington, D.C., situated two blocks from the United States Congress, employing some 30 staff members who reside in D.C., Virginia, and Maryland, and grown as a nationally recognized organization with more than 25 offices nationwide.

For 25 of those years, I personally knew Jamal Khashoggi and grew to call him a close friend. I watched him plant the seeds of what would become his legacy organization: Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), a nonprofit organization that promotes democracy, the rule of law, and human rights for all of the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Today, I serve as a board member of DAWN.

I personally know that Jamal Khashoggi loved working and living in Washington, D.C. That is why he chose D.C. as the city to establish DAWN's headquarters. From D.C., he believed that he could safely and securely promote the values of freedom and free press in the Middle East.

Like so many, I was personally shocked, saddened, and horrified by the brutal murder of Mr. Khashoggi by agents of the Government of Saudi Arabia in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey on October 2, 2018. This planned assassination of a D.C. resident was orchestrated by Saudi officials.

No one should ever have to suffer such a vicious murder, especially at the hands of their own government.

Yet, Mr. Khashoggi was murdered by agents of the government of Saudi Arabia for being an outspoken pro-democracy activist who believed in government transparency and accountability, as well as the fundamental human rights and freedom of all people, no matter which country they live in.

Although three years have passed since his murder, we, Jamal Khashoggi's friends, fellow rights activists, and neighbors have not forgotten him or the government of Saudi Arabia's crime.

While the U.S. government has acknowledged this horrendous crime, it has failed to take any appropriate action against Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman and the government of Saudi Arabia for this murder, and their continued patterns of abuse, harm, and restrictions on the political and religious freedom of its citizens.

That is why we continue to demand justice for Jamal Khashoggi.

By adopting the Jamal Khashoggi Way Designation Act of 2021, the city of D.C. will honor Mr. Khashoggi's legacy as a resident of the city by symbolically renaming the street in front of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, as "Jamal Khashoggi Way." By making this designation, the government of Saudi Arabia will finally be held accountable.

By symbolically renaming this street the D.C. City Council will also be sending a powerful message to the world that Washington, D.C. honors the memory of Jamal Khashoggi forever.

Those who value the freedom of the press and the rights of journalist to speak and write freely will owe the D.C. City Council a great debt of gratitude -- should it adopt Bill 24-22 and memorialize our dear friend and neighbor Jamal Khashoggi.

Sincerely,

Nihad Awad
CAIR National Executive Director