

2025-26
EDITION

Protecting Muslim Students.
Empowering Families.
Promoting Safe Schools.

Maryland
**SCHOOL
BULLYING
PREVENTION
TOOLKIT**



Council on American-Islamic Relations
CAIR Office in Maryland

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*This toolkit was compiled by CAIR's Maryland office. ©2025
Email mdoutreach@cair.com for any questions or additional resources.*

Executive Summary

Bullying in schools remains one of the most pervasive threats to the emotional and academic well-being of students. For American Muslim children, the experience can be compounded by religious and cultural bias, often taking the form of Islamophobic slurs, harassment over religious dress and practices, or exclusion tied to faith accommodations.

This toolkit, developed by the Maryland office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), serves as a comprehensive resource to help students and families identify, prevent, and effectively respond to bullying and harassment—particularly when it targets students because of their faith, ethnicity, or national origin.

Our objective is to ensure that every student in the state can learn in an environment free from fear and discrimination, including Muslim students. This guide outlines:

- The definitions and forms of bullying, including bias-based harassment.
- Federal and state laws that protect students.
- Step-by-step instructions for documenting and reporting incidents.
- Guidance on how families can advocate effectively within the school system.
- A list of resources and organizations that offer support.

Through legal and advocacy support, education, and collaboration, CAIR Maryland stands with families, educators, and communities to promote dignity, safety, and inclusion for Maryland children.

About CAIR Maryland

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. It defends the rights of Muslims through legal representation, public policy advocacy, and community education.

Each year, CAIR Maryland assists many families whose children face bullying and harassment in school settings—often motivated by Islamophobia, racism, or cultural misunderstanding.

This toolkit was developed as part of CAIR Maryland's broader initiative to equip families and students with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to respond to bias-based bullying effectively and lawfully.

Understanding Bullying

What is Bullying?

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. It can be verbal, physical, social, or digital, and is often repeated over time.

Common Forms:

- Verbal: Name-calling, insults, slurs, or threats.
- Physical: Hitting, tripping, or damaging property.
- Social: Spreading rumors, exclusion, or intimidation.
- Cyberbullying: Online harassment or hate speech through texts or social media.



Bias-Based Bullying

When bullying targets a student's religion, race, ethnicity, or national origin, it may constitute discriminatory harassment, which is prohibited under federal law.

Examples involving Muslim students include:

- *Mocking or pulling off a student's hijab or kufi.*
- *Calling students "terrorist," "ISIS," or similar slurs.*
- *Invoking 9/11 in conjunction with the Islamic faith.*
- *Harassing students for fasting during Ramadan or praying at school.*
- *Making derogatory remarks about Arabic or South Asian names.*

“This type of behavior creates a hostile learning environment and deserves immediate attention from educators and administrators.”



Legal Rights & Protections

Federal Protections

Muslim students are safeguarded under several key laws:

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in schools receiving federal funding. This includes harassment based on perceived Arab, South Asian, or Middle Eastern background.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

Addresses sex-based harassment and can overlap with religious or ethnic harassment if it contributes to a hostile environment.

First Amendment Rights

Protects students' freedom to practice and express their faith, including wearing hijab, observing prayers, and speaking about religion in appropriate contexts.

Equal Access Act

Ensures that student religious groups (such as Muslim Student Associations) are given the same access to facilities as other non-curricular clubs.



Maryland State Protections

Maryland's **Safe Schools Reporting Act** (Education Article §7-424) requires public schools to:

- Maintain written anti-bullying, harassment, and intimidation policies based on the Maryland State Department of Education's model policy.
- Establish reporting and investigation procedures, and publish these policies in student handbooks and on websites.
- Investigate every reported incident.
- Train staff to identify and prevent bullying.
- Provide timely written notice to parents of all parties involved.

County boards must report annual summaries of bullying/harassment incidents to the Maryland State Board of Education.

Victims have the option to file reports, including via anonymous tip if available. Cyberbullying (especially severe cases, or those with intent to induce self-harm) also may lead to criminal/civil consequences in Maryland.

“

Failure of schools to appropriately investigate or address bullying may violate both state and federal civil rights law.

”

Recognizing the Signs of Bullying

Parents and educators should watch for indicators that a child may be experiencing bullying.

Recognizing the warning signs of bullying early is essential to stopping harmful behavior before it escalates. This can help make sure that victims receive timely support and intervention.

Students who experience bullying—whether in person or online—are at heightened risk for anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, academic decline, and in severe cases, self-harm.



CAIR's surveys over the past decade consistently show that between 40 to 50 percent of Muslim students report being bullied in schools. Muslim students report being bullied at **more than twice the national average**. These figures are believed to be under-reported as many students do not come forward about their experiences.

Bullying is not always overt or obvious. Recognizing signs requires attentiveness from parents and educators. These signs can include:

- Fear or avoidance of school or certain classmates or teachers/staff.
- Decline in academic performance or engagement.
- Unexplained injuries or damaged belongings.
- Emotional withdrawal, anxiety, or sudden mood changes.
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities.
- Reluctance to wear religious attire (e.g., hijab) due to fear of ridicule.

“Early recognition and intervention are key to preventing long-term harm.”

Respond to Bullying: A Step-by-Step Guide

Step 1: Document the Incident

Maintain a written record of the bullying incident(s). Include:

- Date, time, and location.
- Names of individuals involved and any witnesses.
- Description of the behavior or comments.
- Copies of messages, emails, screenshots, or photographs (if applicable).
- Summary of how the school responded.

Step 2: Report the Bullying in Writing

Submit a formal email or letter of complaint to:

- The teacher or school counselor.
- The principal or assistant principal.
- The district's bullying prevention coordinator or Title IX/Equity Officer.

Ask for a written acknowledgment that the report was received and request a timeline for investigation.

Sample language: "I am reporting the bullying and harassment of my child. I am requesting a written investigation summary, findings, and corrective steps to ensure my child's safety."

Step 3: Follow-Up & Escalate if Necessary

If the school fails to take appropriate action:

- Contact CAIR Maryland at mdoutreach@cair.com for assistance.
- Contact your school district superintendent (*Appendix A*)
- Contact your local school board of education
<https://www.mabe.org/about/member-boards-of-education/>
- File a complaint with the Maryland State Department of Education
<https://news.maryland.gov/msde/contactmsde>

Step 4: Support the Student

- Affirm your child's experiences.
- Reassure them that bullying is not their fault.
- Encourage open dialogue at home.
- Request school-based or private counseling.
- Connect with local faith-based youth programs.

Contact CAIR Maryland at mdoutreach@cair.com for case support or mediation with the school.





Bullying Prevention & Collaboration

For Parents

- Host a free CAIR Maryland “Know Your Rights as a Muslim Student” or Anti-Bullying Workshop at your mosque, community, PTA, or school.
- Request your child’s school regularly share its anti-bullying policy with families.
- Familiarize yourself with the school’s anti-bullying policies and the process and timeline to file complaints.
- Request a copy of your child’s curriculum content to review and understand what your child is learning in the classroom.
- Meet with your child’s teachers and school principal at the start of each school year to introduce yourself to them and proactively establish a line of communication.
- Attend parent/teacher meetings and stay involved in your child’s school.
- Advocate for teachers and administrators to include culturally and religiously diverse educational content in the classroom.
- Join local school climate or DEI committees to advocate for systemic representation and improvements.
- Familiarize yourself with your local school board of education’s website, meeting schedule and the process to sign up to speak at meetings on issues that concern and impact you and your family.
- Build coalitions with like-minded families to advocate for stronger policies.

For Educators

- Intervene immediately when bias-based bullying occurs or is reported.
- Validate students’ experiences and ensure timely follow-up.
- Notify parents as soon as possible about incidents involving their child.
- Integrate lessons on religious and cultural inclusion.
- Partner with CAIR Maryland for staff training or curriculum resources.

CAIR Maryland's Roles & Services

- Legal and advocacy support for families facing bias-based bullying or school discrimination.
- Free Know Your Rights workshops for students, parents, and educators.
- Policy engagement with local school boards and state agencies.



Download CAIR's 2025-26 Back-to-School Resource Guide
<https://bit.ly/cairbts2526>



“My son Muhammad came home one day and said, “Mom, I want to change my name.” He insisted we call him by a different name. We were so confused. It wasn't until months later that we found out he was being bullied and tormented in class. The teacher knew and did nothing to stop it.
-CAIR Client., Arnold, Md.”

Each year, CAIR Maryland processes many cases of Muslim students who have been harassed and bullied because of their faith.

We are committed to defending your family's rights and making sure every student has a safe and inclusive learning environment.

“Somehow we missed the warning signs. Our friendly, social daughter became a shell of her former self. She lost weight, no longer wanted to see her friends, became quiet and withdrawn. She went from being a straight-A student to failing 8th grade and was set back a year.
-CAIR Client, Silver Spring, Md.”

Appendix A

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY SUPERINTENDENTS

Effective July 1, 2025

Dr. Michael J. Martirano
Superintendent
Allegany County Public Schools
P. O. Box 1724
Cumberland, MD 21502
(301) 759-2038

Dr. Mark T. Bedell
Superintendent
Anne Arundel Co. Public Schools
2644 Riva Road
Annapolis, MD 21401
(410) 222-5303

Dr. Sonja B. Santelises
Chief Executive Officer
Baltimore City Public Schools
200 East North Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21202
(410) 396-8803

Dr. Myriam A. Rogers
Superintendent
Baltimore County Public Schools
6901 Charles Street
Towson, MD 21204
(443) 809-4281

Dr. Marcus Newsome
Interim Superintendent
Calvert County Public Schools
1305 Dares Beach Road
Prince Frederick, MD 20678
(443) 550-8009

Dr. Derek L. Simmons
Superintendent
Caroline County Public Schools
204 Franklin Street
Denton, MD 21629
(410) 479-1460

Dr. Cynthia McCabe
Superintendent
Carroll County Public Schools
125 North Court Street
Westminster, MD 21157
(410) 751-3128

Dr. Jeffrey A. Lawson
Superintendent
Cecil County Public Schools
201 Booth Street
Elkton, MD 21921
(410) 996-5499

Dr. Maria V. Navarro
Superintendent
Charles County Public Schools
P.O. Box 2770
5980 Radio Station Road
LaPlata, MD 20646
(301) 934-7223

Dr. Jymil Thompson
Superintendent
Dorchester County Bd. of Education
700 Glasgow Street
Cambridge, MD 21613
(410) 221-1111

Dr. Cheryl L. Dyson
Superintendent
Frederick County Public Schools
191 South East Street
Frederick, MD 21701
(301) 696-6910

Dr. Brenda McCartney
Superintendent
Garrett County Board of Education
770 Dennett Road
Oakland, MD 21550
(301) 334-8901

Dr. Sean W. Bulson
Superintendent
Harford County Public Schools
102 South Hickory Avenue
Bel Air, MD 21014-3731
(410) 588-5204

Mr. William Barnes
Superintendent
Howard County Public Schools
10910 Clarksville Pike
Ellicott City, MD 21042
(410) 313-6677

Dr. Mary Boswell-McComas
Superintendent
Kent County Public Schools
5608 Boundary Avenue
Rock Hall, MD 21661
(410) 778-7113

Dr. Thomas W. Taylor
Superintendent
Montgomery County Public Schools
15 West Gude Drive; Suite 400
Rockville, MD 20850
(240) 740-3020

Dr. Shawn Joseph
Interim Superintendent
Prince George's Co. Public Schools
14201 School Lane
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772
(301) 952-6008

Dr. Matthew Kibler
Interim Superintendent
Queen Anne's Co. Bd. of Education
202 Chesterfield Avenue
Centreville, MD 21617
(410) 758-2403

Dr. James Scott Smith
Superintendent
St. Mary's County Public Schools
23160 Moakley Street
Suite 109
Leonardtown, MD 20650
(301) 475-5511, ext. 32178

Dr. Ava S. Tasker-Mitchell
Superintendent
Somerset County Public Schools
7982-A Tawes Campus Drive
Westover, Maryland 21871
(410) 651-1616 ext. 10226

Dr. Sharon M. Pepukayi
Superintendent
Talbot County Public Schools
P. O. Box 1029
Easton, MD 21601
(410) 822-0330

Dr. David T. Sovine
Superintendent
Washington Co. Public Schools
10435 Downsville Pike
Hagerstown, MD 21740
(301) 766-2815

Dr. Micah C. Stauffer
Superintendent
Wicomico Co. Board of Education
2424 Northgate Drive
Salisbury, MD 21802-1538
(410) 677-4495

Dr. Annette Wallace
Superintendent
Worcester Co. Board of Education
6270 Worcester Highway
Newark, MD 21841
(410) 632-5020

CAIR Maryland School Bullying & Harassment Reporting Form

Documenting Bias-Based Bullying, Harassment, or Discrimination in Maryland Schools

Instructions: Use this form to document and report any incidents of bullying, harassment, or discrimination at school. Keep a copy of this completed form for your records, and submit one to your child's teacher and school principal. You may also share a copy with CAIR Maryland for confidential review and support. Email: mdoutreach@cair.com

SECTION 1 — STUDENT INFORMATION

Student Name: _____
Age/Grade: _____ School Name: _____
School District: _____
Parent/Guardian Name: _____
Phone: _____ Email: _____
Preferred Language: _____

SECTION 2 — INCIDENT DETAILS

Date of Incident: _____
Time: _____
Location: ☐ Classroom ☐ Hallway ☐ Cafeteria ☐ Bus ☐ Online ☐ Other: _____

Type of Incident (check all that apply):

- ☐ Verbal (name-calling, slurs, threats) ☐ Physical (hitting, pushing, property damage)
☐ Social/Relational (exclusion, rumors) ☐ Cyberbullying (online or text-based harassment)
☐ Other: _____

Description of Incident:

(Describe what happened, who was involved, and what was said or done. Use additional pages if needed.)

Names of individuals involved (if known):

- Aggressor(s): _____
- Witnesses: _____

(cont'd on next page)

SECTION 3 — POSSIBLE MOTIVE

☐ Religion ☐ Race ☐ Ethnicity ☐ National Origin ☐ Gender ☐ Disability ☐ Appearance ☐ Other

If you believe this was **bias-based bullying**, please explain why (e.g., comments about hijab, Arabic name, accent, prayer, etc.):

SECTION 4 — REPORTING AND SCHOOL RESPONSE

Who was the incident reported to? (check all that apply):

☐ Teacher ☐ Counselor ☐ Principal ☐ Other Staff: _____

Date Reported: _____

How was it reported?

☐ In Person ☐ In Writing ☐ Email ☐ Phone ☐ Online Form

Did the school respond?

☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, describe the action taken:

Has the bullying continued? ☐ Yes ☐ No

SECTION 5 — IMPACT ON STUDENT

☐ Fear of attending school ☐ Drop in grades ☐ Emotional distress
☐ Physical injuries ☐ Social isolation ☐ Loss of interest in activities

Describe any emotional, physical, or academic effects:

SECTION 6 — SUPPORT & FOLLOW-UP

Requested Actions:

☐ Meeting with school administrator ☐ Safety plan for student ☐ Transfer of class/bus seat
☐ Counseling or mediation ☐ Disciplinary action against aggressor ☐ Other: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

(Optional) Submit a Copy To:

CAIR Maryland | Council on American-Islamic Relations – Maryland Office

 mdoutreach@cair.com  (410) 261-6544

CAIR–Maryland may assist you in filing a complaint with your local school district.



CAIR

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