

# 2016 CIVIL RIGHTS Report



**CAIR**  
OKLAHOMA



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## LETTER FROM CIVIL RIGHTS DIRECTOR



Assalaamu alaikum to my dear CAIR Oklahoma family!

After celebrating my second anniversary as your Civil Rights Director, I spent a lot of time reflecting on the growth that the Civil Rights Department has enjoyed since its inception. The opportunity to serve your community and to advocate for civil rights in our great state has been an honor and a pleasure. Thanks to your generous donations of your time, money, and support, we have created the second annual Civil Rights Report to show you the progress that CAIR-OK has made since the end of 2015 and the many new developments we hope to enjoy in years to come.

2016 saw many triumphs for the Muslim community, not least the growth of the CAIR-OK family to include our Government Affairs Department, new programs and opportunities to increase our resources, and the introduction of new interns and volunteers to help support our mission. However, we also saw some troubling developments in the midst of a tumultuous year. Your support and encouragement enabled us to respond strongly to threats to civil rights in our state, and the second year of the Civil Rights Department saw us at the forefront of the struggle to protect civil liberties against increasing threats.

Despite the difficulties of the past year, I have grown tremendously in my understanding of the Oklahoma Muslim community and been deeply honored by your trust in my department. I have embraced these opportunities to support you, and I am so fortunate to count you among my friends and family and to be included as a part of your community.

The fight for civil rights in Oklahoma can seem daunting, but I believe that the past year has situated CAIR-OK to be one of the state's staunchest defenders of civil liberties, working with our coalitions to protect the rights of all Oklahomans. I look forward to standing with you, serving with you, and strengthening the future of our state together with you all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Veronica Laizure". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Veronica Laizure



## LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIRMAN



Assalamu Alaikum,

On behalf of the board of directors and staff of CAIR Oklahoma, I want to take this opportunity to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your support over the last 11 years. It is only because of your continued support that we are able to protect the civil liberties of Oklahoma Muslims. This work would not be possible without the generous support of the Oklahoma Muslim community, and for that we are appreciative.

As you may recall, Veronica Laizure joined us in November 2014 as the Civil Rights Director. Since that time, she has shown an increasing commitment to upholding civil liberties, enhancing the understanding of Islam, challenging Islamophobia, and promoting dialogue. The importance of her focus on these initiatives has become even more evident in light of the recent divisive campaign and election, the increased Islamophobic rhetoric from state and federal officials, and growing tensions in the community.

We are living through rather unfortunate and indeed very challenging times. But we must continue to stand up and fight for our rights as equal citizens of this country and as proud Oklahomans. Our job as Muslims, and especially as Muslims living in the West, is to stand with the truth, with justice, with equality, regardless of where we find these virtues.

We must continue our endeavors for safeguarding the rights of the Oklahoma Muslim Community. In light of the events of the past year, it has become even more important for us to fight for our rights so that our children don't have to.

The release of our second Civil Rights Report serves an example of what our community continues to achieve as a direct result of the focused vision, hard work, and support of community members. The accomplishments of CAIR-OK do not belong solely to the organization, but rather are a reflection of the Oklahoma Muslim community as a whole.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tariq Sattar'.

Tariq Sattar  
Chairman of the CAIR-OK Board of Directors



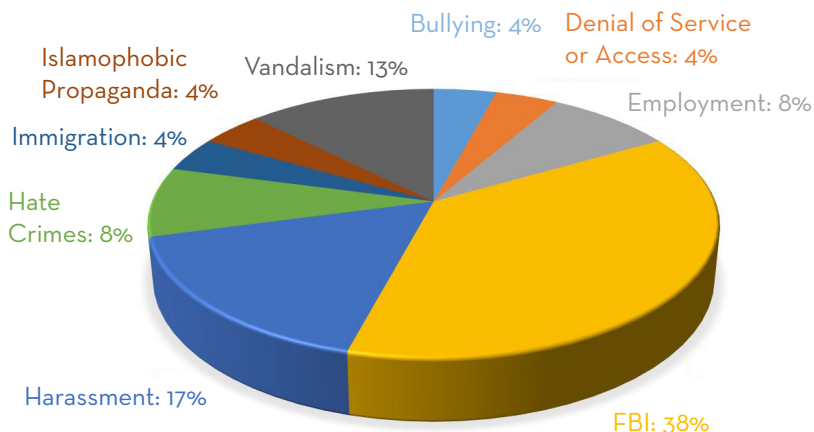
# ABOUT THE CIVIL RIGHTS DEPARTMENT

The CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department responds to hundreds of calls seeking legal aid or assistance. During the first stages of handling a complaint, we look for evidence of anti-Muslim bias, discrimination, harassment, or, in the case of criminal activity, motive. We interview the complainant and research each case thoroughly to determine if the services of the Civil Rights Department are necessary. Each year, we provide help to dozens of people and families, responding to Islamophobia, discrimination, and civil rights violations against our community.

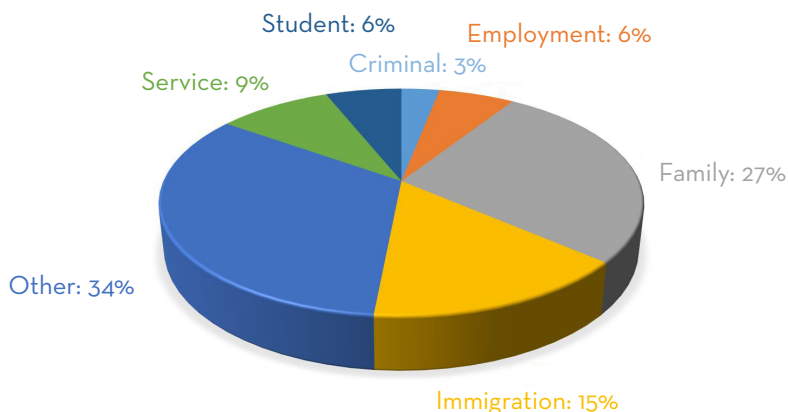
## THE MOST COMMON ISSUES HANDLED BY OUR DEPARTMENT INCLUDE:

- ✿ Employment Issues: Wrongful termination, failure to hire, failure to promote
- ✿ Schools and Students: Bullying, anti-Muslim materials, religious accommodations
- ✿ Harassment and Hate Incidents: verbal and physical attacks, mosque vandalism, hate crimes
- ✿ Denial of Religious Accommodation: failure to provide reasonable accommodation for religious practices
- ✿ Travel-related Issues: No-fly cases, TRIP complaints, invasive screening
- ✿ FBI: Law enforcement intrusion, inappropriate questioning or contact

## DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS



## NON-DISCRIMINATION RELATED AND REFERRALS



Where a case or issue is outside the scope or resources of the Civil Rights Department, we refer clients to an expanded network of legal service providers and monitor the case as it progresses, helping our clients navigate the complicated legal system.

### CASES REFERRED TO OTHER SERVICES:

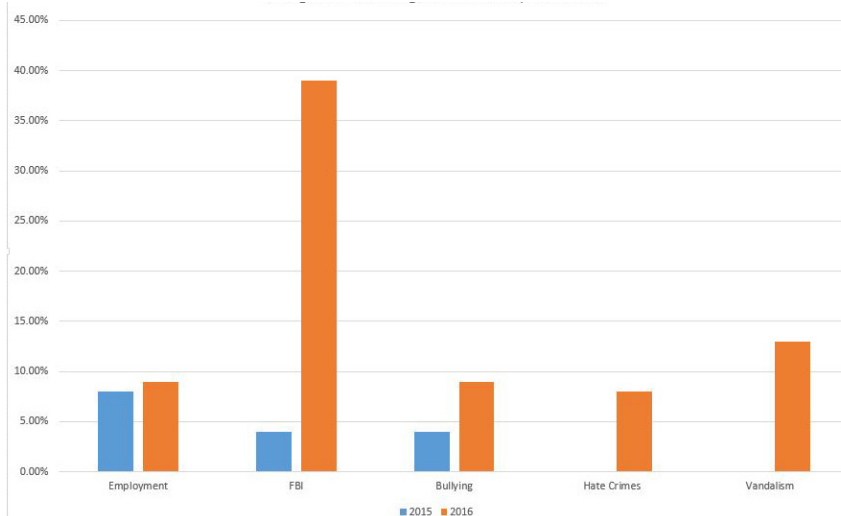
- ✿ Family & Custody Disputes
- ✿ Immigration Law
- ✿ Non-Discriminatory Employment Law
- ✿ Criminal Defense
- ✿ Property & Landlord-Tenant Disputes

### WE ALSO PROVIDE CONNECTIONS TO A VARIETY OF OTHER SERVICES:

- ✿ Mental Health
- ✿ Counseling
- ✿ Women's Resource Centers
- ✿ State and Federal Support Services



## CHANGES IN PERCENTAGES OF TOTAL CALLS 2015-2016



## STATISTICS

Each year, about half the calls processed by the CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department show some evidence of anti-Muslim bias, discrimination, or harassment. Of the calls that are recorded as civil rights intakes, we then try to distill the complaint into one of several categories that helps us conceptualize the needs of each caller and the resources we have available.

From 2015 to 2016 employment-related complaints stayed even, representing around 10% of the total complaints processed. A concerning trend is a huge increase in FBI-related complaints; however, the spike in numbers could be related to better reporting procedures and the results of Know Your Rights campaigns throughout the Muslim community. In the past year, we saw a huge increase in complaints involving vandalism or destruction to mosques or Islamic centers as well as an alarming number of hate crimes involving violence.

In the non-discrimination related calls that the Civil Rights Department processed, we saw an increase in referrals for family and custody related services as well as for immigration services.

## STAFF

The Civil Rights Department is headed by the Civil Rights Director, Veronica Laizure. Veronica joined CAIR-OK after graduating from OU College of Law and being admitted to practice in 2014. She took on the role of Civil Rights Director in 2015. In addition to representing clients who are victims of discrimination or harassment and providing referral services, the Civil Rights Director is responsible for the development of resources for the Muslim community, hosting community education forums and workshops, and providing legal counsel for the organization.

The Civil Rights Director is assisted by Legal Interns from the top law schools in Oklahoma. Our 2016 Legal Interns assisted in Ramadan programming, communicated with clients, and helped resolve dozens of civil rights related issues. They also completed research projects and drafted legal briefs to support the work of the Civil Rights Director.



Veronica Laizure, Civil Rights Director



Mikael Bryant, OCU College of Law (Spring 2016) (not pictured)  
 Jessica Ladd, OU College of Law (Summer 2016)  
 Phillip Chapman, OCU College of Law (Summer 2016)



## CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS

In 2016, the CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department developed a number of new resources for the Oklahoma Muslim community, expanding our vision and streamlining the services we provide. We responded to some troubling new developments in our state, including a divisive campaign and election, increased Islamophobic rhetoric from state and federal officials, and growing tension in the community. We also celebrated successes and triumphs - many of which would not be possible without vital support from our community.



### ELECTION 2016

The 2016 Election cycle saw some of the most divisive, inflammatory, and aggressive campaign rhetoric in recent memory. CAIR-OK aimed to increase Muslim voter registration and attendance and to educate the Muslim community on the important issues raised on state and federal ballots. Voter registration drives took place across the state, with the goal of having every qualified Muslim voter registered and up to date. We developed the first ever Oklahoma Muslim Voter Guide, which provided resources on registration, voting, and the State Questions that were presented on the 2016 ballot. We carefully researched the issues on each State Questions and developed the guide to make the language accessible to the average voter. We also hosted workshops to bring our materials to audiences across the state.





## CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS (CON.)

### NEW INCIDENT REPORT FORM

The Civil Rights Department responded to a staggering number of bias incidents in 2016, particularly after the November 8 election. Nationally, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported over 800 hate crimes and bias incidents in just the 7 weeks following the election. To make reporting an incident easier, we developed a new Incident Report Form which streamlines the reporting process, allowing us to closely track the growth in Islamophobic incidents in our state.



### ACLU OF OKLAHOMA'S ANGIE DEBO AWARD

The American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma (ACLU of OK) presented the state's top civil liberties award to CAIR-OK and its Executive Director, Adam Soltani. The award is named after the writer, historian, and civil rights advocate Angie Debo, who relentlessly pursued justice alongside the ACLU of Oklahoma in the 1960s and 1970s. ACLU of OK Director Ryan Kiesel praised CAIR-OK for its outstanding civil rights advocacy, saying that, "all Oklahomans are the beneficiaries of the brave work done by CAIR-OK."



### MUSLIM ADVOCACY DAY ON CAPITOL HILL

In April, the CAIR-OK Civil Rights Director traveled to Washington, D.C., to take part in the United States Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO) Muslim Advocacy Day. We took part in meeting with three of Oklahoma's federal representatives, discussing important legislation and the climate of Islamophobia that Oklahoma constituents are facing. Meeting with representatives of the community is a vital part of America's democratic process, and we hope to build on positive relationships with our national lawmakers.





## EMPLOYMENT

Some of the most pressing issues that the Civil Rights Department handles are issues related to employment. We frequently hear reports of Muslim employees being denied reasonable religious accommodations in the workplace, being harassed and subjected to a hostile working environment, and even being wrongfully terminated because of their religious practices.

### EEOC REFERRALS

The first step in the majority of employment cases is to file a formal complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC), which then investigates the complaint and issues its recommendations. We are able to streamline the complaint filing process and facilitate in the investigation, where appropriate, and to help our clients navigate the confusing and sometimes frustrating process of an EEOC investigation and resolution process. This year, the CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department helped file a record number of employment complaints with the EEOC, many of which are still in the process of being investigated or resolved.

### EMPLOYER'S GUIDES

In order to help facilitate healthy and respectful relationships between Muslim employees and their supervisors, managers, and bosses, we developed two guides that outline common Islamic religious practices and explain the rights and obligations of Muslim employees in the workplace.

The Employer's Guide to Ramadan is a resource specific to the month-long Ramadan fast, and it helps employers understand the importance of fasting and some ways to accommodate employees who choose to fast. The Employer's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices is a more general resource, meant to educate employers on some of the most basic religious practices of Muslims, such as prayer, clothing choices, and dietary requirements. It provides some examples of appropriate workplace accommodations and outlines the legal obligations of employers and their Muslim employees.

A copy of any of our employment guides can be obtained by emailing a request to [info@ok.cair.com](mailto:info@ok.cair.com).



## SCHOOLS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

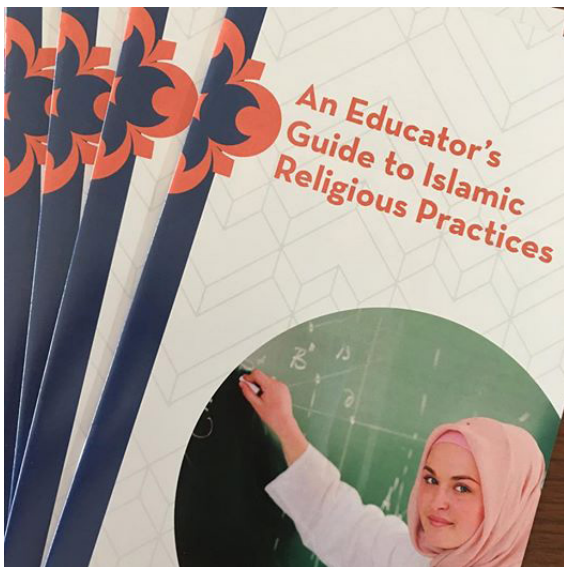
CAIR-OK believes that an education should be a child's highest priority and that every child should be able to learn in a safe, supportive, and encouraging educational environment. Unfortunately, we often hear complaints that Muslim students are being bullied or harassed, or that their religious accommodations are not being honored. In the past year, we have worked to build positive relationships with educators at local public and private institutions, opening up dialogues with schools and administrations to ensure that Muslim students are enjoying an optimal learning environment.



### TITLE III SYMPOSIUM

After a number of successful presentations at local schools, the Civil Rights Department brought its workshop titled "Eliminating Bias: Understanding Muslim Students and Families" to the Title III Consortium of the Oklahoma State Department of Education. The consortium, which was focused on implementing programs to support Limited English Proficiency and immigrant students, welcomed the input on the cultural practices of Muslim students and families, and the presentation has since then been expanded to other educational institutions.

Title III is a part of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, specifically targeted to benefit Limited English Proficiency children and immigrant youth.



### OKCHE SYMPOSIUM

In September 2016, the Civil Rights Director was invited to take place on a panel at the Oklahoma Council of History Educators' Annual Symposium, discussing issues of diversity and cultural competency alongside other local leaders and activists. Throughout the session, history and social studies teachers from around the state shared their experiences and learned from panelists and speakers about the best ways to support diversity in the classroom.

### EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

One of the most important resources produced in 2016 was the **Educator's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices**. Updated for use by Oklahoma educators and administrators, the **Educator's Guide** outlines some of the most common religious practices of Muslim students and families and offers best practices in supporting these students in and out of the classroom. Released in 2017, the Guide will be available free of charge with the goal of placing a Guide and other relevant materials in every school in Oklahoma.

A copy of the Educator's Guide can be obtained by emailing a request to [info@ok.cair.com](mailto:info@ok.cair.com).



## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS SEMINARS AND WEBINARS

Part of the mission of the Civil Rights Department is to ensure that the Muslim community has the skills, knowledge, and confidence to assert their civil rights in the event that they face discrimination or harassment. The Know Your Rights workshops are a vital part of educating the Muslim community on how to react in a variety of situations, from employment discrimination to school bullying to travel-related delays and profiling. The CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department produced a record number of in-person workshops and seminars and also began offering web-based workshops for the first time, allowing for collaboration with other CAIR chapters around the country, greater flexibility in scheduling the sessions, and the ability to record and re-produce the information at later dates.

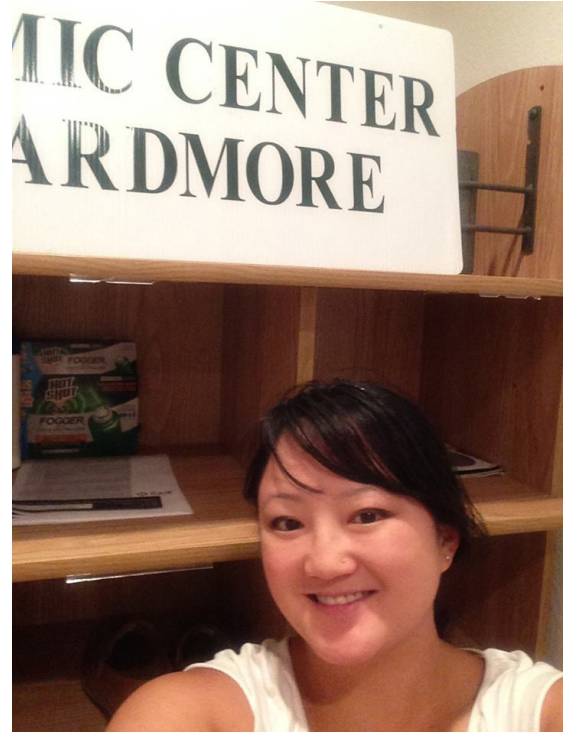


### HAJJ WEBINAR

In advance of the Hajj pilgrimage in August 2016, CAIR-OK Civil Right Director Veronica Laizure joined CAIR National staff in a webinar about travelers' rights while flying, particularly when entering and exiting the United States.

### EMPLOYMENT AND RAMADAN WEBINARS

In June 2016, The Civil Rights Department took part in two webinars designed to assist Muslim employees with following the Ramadan fasting requirements while on the job. The Employment KYR focused on the larger issue of obtaining workplace accommodations generally, including rights to prayer breaks, modified uniform requirements, and other issues that Muslim employees often face. The Ramadan KYR, timed to begin in advance of the month-long fasting period, provided examples of reasonable workplace accommodations for fasting employees and suggested methods of requesting such accommodations to a boss, superior, or Human Relations manager.



### TRAVELING PRESENTATIONS

The Civil Rights Department was able to expand its mission to mosques outside of Oklahoma's major metropolitan areas in 2016, bringing KYR presentations to Stillwater and Ardmore for the first time. From students' rights to employment concerns to law enforcement issues, we reached out to Muslim communities farther away, building connections that help us serve Muslims in the entire state of Oklahoma.

If you would like to schedule a KYR Presentation for your mosque or community center, email a request to [info@ok.cair.com](mailto:info@ok.cair.com).



# HATE INCIDENTS AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

Unfortunately, while 2016 saw a number of great successes for the Civil Rights Department, we also witnessed an alarming number of hate incidents in our state. From vandalism to verbal assault to threats to murder, Muslims in Oklahoma faced a number of frightening events, reminding us of the threat of Islamophobia that we work to combat.



## KHALID JABARA

On August 12, 2016, 33-year-old Khalid Jabara was murdered by his next door neighbor, Stanley Majors, after he and his family endured years of harassment. Majors called them “dirty Arabs,” “dirty Lebanaese,” and “Moos-lems;” sent them threatening letters and voicemails; and even struck Khalid’s mother Haifa Jabara with his car, causing her to undergo multiple surgeries. This campaign of hate, culminating in Khalid’s death and Majors’s being charged with murder, alerted the Tulsa community to the consequences of anti-Muslim bias and sparking conversations about changes to Oklahoma’s hate crime statutes, hoping to increase the protections available to victims of racially- or religiously-motivated crime. CAIR-OK joined in the creation of a Launchgood campaign to raise money for the family of the victim, which brought in over \$25,000 in a few weeks.

## SAVANNA STABBING

In May 2016, a Bangladeshi clerk at a gas station in Savanna, OK, was attacked by a man calling him a “terrorist.” After stabbing the clerk several times in the head and neck, the perpetrator was arrested outside the store and the clerk was airlifted to a Tulsa hospital. The Tulsa Muslim community, upon hearing of the tragic crime, helped fund the clerk’s surgery and is continuing to provide support as he heals.



## LAWTON MOSQUE

A number of disturbing incidents at mosques and Islamic centers around the nation had the Muslim community on alert. Nationally, mosques and Islamic centers reported over 73 cases of vandalism and destruction of property. Some of the worst accounts included arson, firebombing, and severe damage to property.

In December, vandals dumped the carcass of a pig at the Islamic Center of Lawton – according to some reports, the animal may have been stolen from a local farm before being butchered and dropped at the mosque. However, these incidents often led to greater interfaith cooperation and positive relationship building: After the Lawton incident, the town's Unitarian church hosted an interfaith forum for the community to discuss the incident and encourage respect and tolerance in the community.



Representative John Bennett has represented his district, HD-2, since 2010. This district includes Sallisaw, Muldrow, Vian, and Stoney Point. He defended his seat in 2012, 2014, and most recently in 2016, when he defeated his opponent, Tom Stites, by a narrow margin at 54% to 46%.

## INTERIM STUDY H16-O29

An interim study proposed by Representative John Bennett, R-Sallisaw, was heard on Oct. 25 at the State Capitol despite protests from the Oklahoma interfaith community. The study, titled “Radical Islam, Sharia Law, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the radicalization process,” purported to examine the threat of “radical Islamic terrorists” to the state of Oklahoma. Instead, it was a four-hour hearing in which Representative John Bennett claimed that all Muslim organizations in the state were terrorist fronts; that CAIR-OK Executive Director Adam Soltani was a terrorist, as was local faith leader Imam Imad Enchassi; that CAIR-OK staff were “suit wearing jihadis,” and the CAIR-OK and its parent organization CAIR National were fronts for terrorist organizations such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. In opposition to the hearing, faith leaders from around the state and from several religious traditions were present, but no comment was allowed from the public and few other legislators attended the hearing to ask questions or object. At the close of the hearing, Representative Bennett promise that if reelected, he would develop legislation to “kick CAIR out of Oklahoma,” but at the time of this publication, no such legislation has been filed.





## SOCIAL JUSTICE COALITIONS AND OUTREACH

The CAIR Oklahoma Civil Rights Department had its busiest year ever as we formed new coalitions, made new allies, developed new partnerships, and strengthened our existing ties to Oklahoma's social justice community. From rallies to hashtags to open letters to workshops, we have worked tirelessly to spread our message throughout the Oklahoma community and even beyond.

### AR FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION

For the first time, the Civil Rights Director was invited to travel out of state to speak on a panel about discrimination in housing practices and other civil rights subjects. The Arkansas Fair Housing Commission's Annual Conference in Little Rock, AR, featured speakers and panelists to discuss fair housing and lending practices as well as representatives from government agencies that enforce civil rights laws in these areas.

### PIONEER LIBRARY SYSTEM

In August 2016, the Pioneer Library System in Norman, OK, placed a series of images on the library's cars. One of these ads featured a woman wearing a hijab. A few angry citizens wrote to speak against the library systems' efforts to feature diversity in their advertising. In response, CAIR-OK and many other community members publicly thanked Pioneer Library System for their recognition of the pluralistic nature of the Oklahoma community, and the ads remained in place.

### #NOTMYENEMY

During the October Interim Study on "Radical Islam, The Muslim Brotherhood, Sharia Law, and the radicalization process" hosted by noted Islamophobe Representative John Bennet, R-Sallisaw, CAIR-OK Executive Director Adam Soltani and Imam Imad Enchassi, a noted scholar, teacher, and, faith leader, and peaceful activist, were branded as "terrorists" and "enemies" of the state of Oklahoma. In response, CAIR-OK and its interfaith allies published the hashtag "Not My Enemy," where hundreds of examples of interfaith cooperation, dialogue, and friendship were shared, demonstrating that Oklahoma Muslims are an integral part of the broader community.







## ISLAMOPHOBIA AND NONPROFITS

The Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits invited CAIR-OK to present workshops in Tulsa and Oklahoma City on the impact of Islamophobia in the work of nonprofit organizations in June 2016. Executive Director Adam Soltani and Civil Rights Director Veronica Laizure joined representatives from nonprofit organizations, interfaith groups, and state agencies to discuss the role of Islamophobia in the work of service organizations, strategizing better ways for these vital services to reach needy segments of the Muslim population.

## TERENCE CRUTCHER RESPONSE

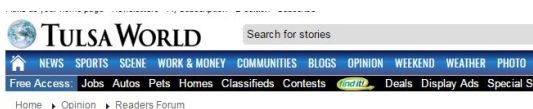
The tragic shooting of unarmed North Tulsa resident Terence Crutcher at the hands of Tulsa Police Officer Betty Shelby sparked protests and rallies across the state. As an immediate response, the CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department spearheaded an open letter to the Tulsa Police Chief, Tulsa's Mayor Dewey Bartlett and Mayor-elect G.T. Bynum, and the U.S. Department of Justice. Co-signed by dozens of interfaith and social justice partners, the letter urged a fair and transparent investigation into the circumstances of the shooting and called for culturally relevant training for police officers across the city. Officer Shelby was charged with first-degree manslaughter.

## CONNECTIONS WITH OKLAHOMA'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

CAIR-OK's mission is deeply affected by the intersectionality of issues that affect Oklahoma's minority communities. In the past year, CAIR-OK doubled its efforts to reach out to Oklahoma's robust, active Native American communities, sharing resources and assisting in efforts to protect the rights of indigenous people. A record number of indigenous speakers and subjects participated in CAIR-OK events such as Muslim Day at the Capitol and the Muslim Youth Leadership Symposium, introducing the Muslim community to the common struggles faced by the two communities. When the OKC City Council met to discuss the recognition of October 12 as Indigenous Peoples Day, CAIR-OK Staff attended the meeting in support of the many speakers who asked city councilors to formally recognize the celebration of the holiday. When controversy over the construction of an oil pipeline at the Standing Rock Sioux reservation erupted, CAIR-OK spoke at the rally, held at the State Capitol, demonstrating solidarity with the indigenous activists suffering civil rights violations in South Dakota.

## PUBLICATIONS AND MEDIA

The CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department is a continually well-represented voice in local news. With thoughtful commentary and analysis, the staff and interns produce blog posts and op-eds that are seen by readers all over the world. CAIR-OK is also the first stop for local media who have questions about issues relating to civil rights and American Muslims, and our staff are frequently interviewed and featured in news broadcasts to discuss the vital work of our organization.



### Veronica Laizure: Anti-Muslim rhetoric threatens us all

Story Comments (18) [Print](#) [Font Size](#) [Share](#) [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [Google+](#) [Pinterest](#) [StumbleUpon](#)

Posted: Wednesday, May 18, 2016 12:00 am



By VERONICA LAIZURE | 18 comments

Recently, anti-Muslim hate rhetoric claimed another victim when a man allegedly walked into a Pittsburg County gas station and stabbed the clerk in the back and neck, calling him a "terrorist."



## LEADERSHIP

The CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department pioneered its Legal Intern Program in Summer 2015, bringing the best and brightest minds to work in the Civil Rights Department. Since then, legal interns, as well as interns in other departments, have gone on to attend graduate programs, complete studies across the world, work for judges and law firms, and pioneer other social justice programs locally and nationally.

### LEGAL INTERNS

2016 saw an expanded internship program with interns serving during both Fall and Spring semesters as well as during the Summer term. In addition to legal research and briefing, client intake and management, and document analysis for the Civil Rights Department, interns assisted in programming during the Muslim Youth Leadership Symposium, developed KYR workshops for the Muslim community, wrote blog posts and articles about their experiences, and completed research projects on a variety of topics. After successful completion of an internship, some even chose to return to the CAIR-OK office for additional service! The Civil Rights Department is fortunate to enjoy the benefit of the best, brightest, most talented minds to assist in its mission.

### YOUTH LEADERSHIP

CAIR-OK has pioneered youth leadership programs for students from high school age to college and beyond, helping young Muslims navigate their faith and identity through their educational and work experiences. The addition of youth-specific programming at Muslim Day at the Capitol, combined with the development of the Young Professionals Network and the continuation of the Muslim Youth Leadership Symposium, provides year-round opportunities for young Muslims to benefit from the services of CAIR-OK's staff.



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