

# 2018 CIVIL RIGHTS Report



## CAIR OKLAHOMA

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## LETTER FROM CIVIL RIGHTS DIRECTOR



Assalamu Alaikum and greetings of peace,

This Civil Rights Report represents the culmination of another year's hard work protecting civil liberties in Oklahoma. As a chapter, CAIR-OK cares deeply for the future of our state, and throughout 2018 I believe we have shown our dedication through every part of our work as a leading advocate for civil rights. Without your generous support, we would not be in a position to be recognized as champions of justice, nor would we be able to grow and expand as an organization to meet the many challenges that we face. For all you have granted me, and for the honor of serving as your Civil Rights Department, I thank you deeply.

The challenges of 2018 showed us the power of activism at the local, state, and national levels, and the importance of understanding the roots of historical oppression so that we may look forward to a better, brighter future. We have always striven to meet each new challenge with our best work and to keep you informed on how to be the most powerful advocates for your own community. Although we saw progress in some areas and welcomed positive growth in our coalition building and our community outreach, we also saw that Islamophobia, racism, and bigotry are still firmly entrenched among those who seem determined to remain hateful. We promise to maintain our stance against hatred and intolerance, and to reject those who would seek to divide our community with fear and mistrust. Now more than ever, it is vital that we remain connected to each other's struggles and to recognize that none of us can truly advance if we are leaving others behind.

I am so grateful for the years I have had to learn from you, work with you, and join you in the fight to make our state safer for all its citizens. I thank you for your compassion and your willingness to join me in this struggle. You truly represent all that makes our community great, and I pledge that I will always remain your colleague, your advocate, and your friend.

As we continue our work as the state's leading Muslim civil rights organization, I am confident that we will remain at the forefront of a new movement which seeks to uplift all voices and to empower all peoples, in the face of hate and division. Your support enables us to uplift our community as a voice for positive change in Oklahoma, and I thank you deeply for making our work possible.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Veronica Laizure', written over a light blue grid background.

Veronica Laizure

# INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the Civil Rights Department responded to hundreds of complaints, submitted through texts, emails, phone calls, and the website reporting system. These complaints originate in communities throughout our state. Each complaint goes through a thorough intake procedure, where the complainant is interviewed and all relevant materials are reviewed. During the review process, we look for evidence of anti-Muslim motives or circumstances and classify each complaint according to the factors present. If our services are needed, we assist our clients up to and including lawsuits and litigation, if necessary.

## The most common issues we handle:

- Employment issues: failure to hire, wrongful termination, harassment on the job
- Islamophobic propaganda: sharing and propagating Islamophobia in print, on the air, or online
- Denial of religious accommodation: failure to provide reasonable accommodations for religious practices
- Law Enforcement: profiling, intrusion, inappropriate questioning or contact
- Harassment and Hate Crime: bullying, verbal and physical attacks, damage to property, violence
- Travel-related issues: No-Fly cases, TRIPS complaints, invasive screening procedures

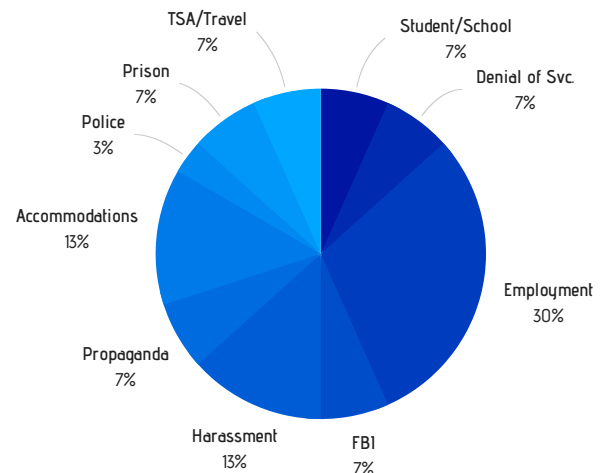
Where a case or issue does not fall within the scope of our services, we refer clients to a network of legal services and provide additional services where needed.

- Immigration Law: non-Executive Order-related immigration issues, visa applications, citizenship applications, etc.
- Family Law: divorces, child custody, protective orders
- Criminal Law: criminal defense
- Property Law: landlord-tenant disputes, probate, real property transfers, etc.
- Non-discriminatory Employment Law
- Personal Injury: car accidents, medical malpractice, etc.

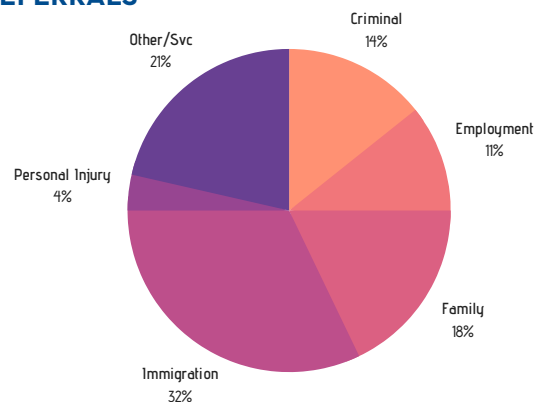
We also provide connections to many other necessary services:

- Mental health counseling
- Women's resource centers
- State and federal support services
- Food and rental assistance through local nonprofits

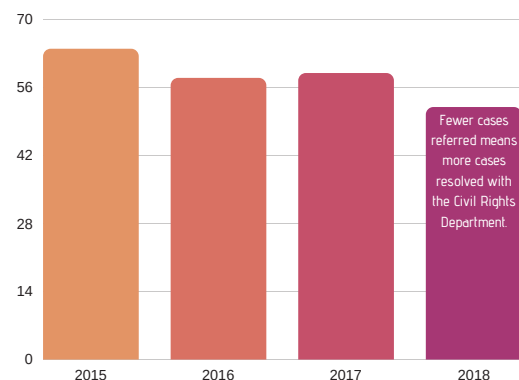
## DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS



## REFERRALS



## Percentage of cases requiring referrals



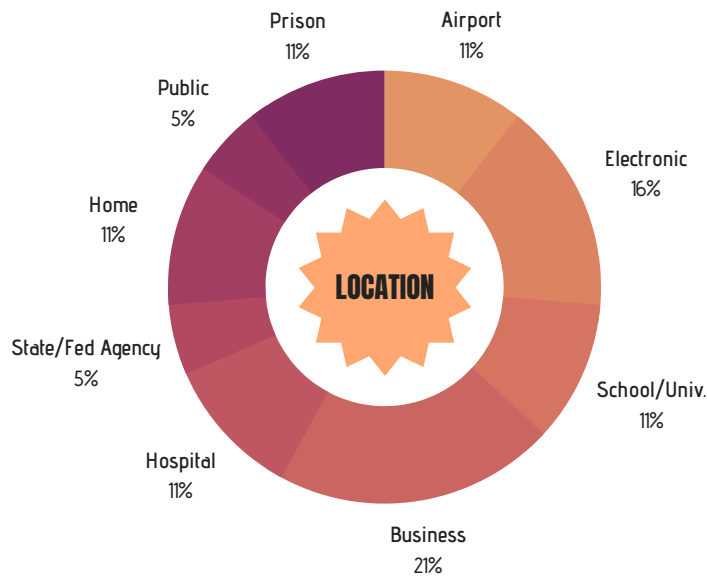
## METHODOLOGY:

The information in this report is based on complaints received about incidents that occurred between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2018. Complaints are received via telephone, email, or our online complaint reporting form and entered into a secure database, which supplements the case management system.

Each complaint is processed and categorized based on several factors that are determined during initial intake and follow-up calls:

- **TYPE OF ABUSE**

- This category specifies the type of discrimination that the complainant is experiencing. Since many cases show evidence of multiple types of abuse, staff determine which of the categories applies the best based on the evidence presented during intake and interviews.
- o *Denial of Accommodation* – refusal to accommodate Muslim religious practices
  - o *Denial of service or access* – Refusal to provide service or access to services
  - o *Employment* – hiring, firing, and promotional decisions based on discriminatory factors
  - o *FBI* – inappropriate contact from FBI agents
  - o *Harassment* – threatening or disturbing content directed at an individual or group of individuals; can be via phone, email, social media, or in person
  - o *Hate crimes* – includes damage to property, verbal or physical assault, or other crimes against persons committed based on victims' identity
  - o *Islamophobic Propaganda* – the sharing or spreading of Islamophobic images, memes, or other information; usually on social media, but also includes posters or flyers placed in public locations
  - o *Prisoner* – complaints from incarcerated persons
  - o *State/local Police* – inappropriate or abusive conduct by a state or local police officer or agency, based on discriminatory factors
  - o *Student/school* – bullying, harassment, or unfair treatment against a student in an educational institution
  - o *Travel ban* – families affected by the Muslim ban executive orders
  - o *TSA* – discrimination occurring at domestic airports, committed by TSA agents
  - o *Watchlist* – presence on a No-Fly or selected list that results in difficulties with travel, employment, etc.



#### • LOCATION

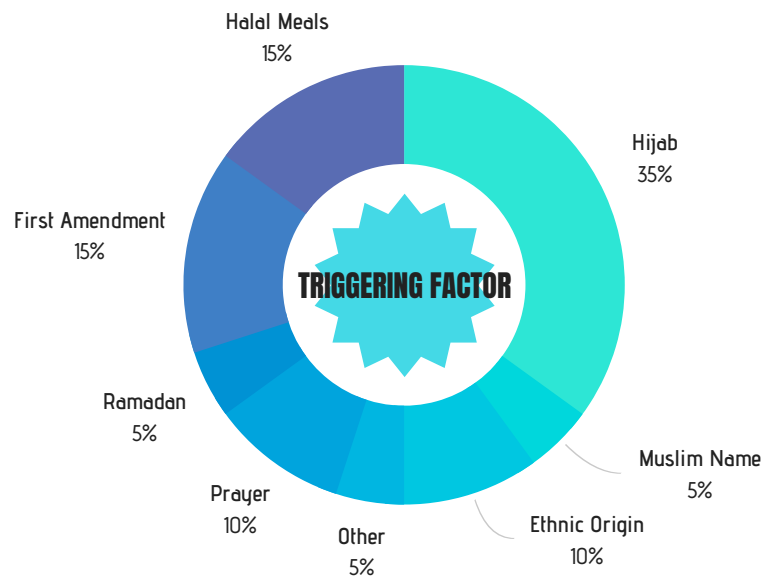
The location of the actions that form the basis of the complaint is an important part of assessing who is at fault and what actions need to be taken to help the complainant.

- o University or school
- o State/federal agency
- o Restaurant, store, or other place of business
- o Home
- o Work
- o Airport or other transportation hub
- o Online

#### • TRIGGERING FACTOR

The triggering factor that caused the discriminatory action can be difficult to determine, and not all complaints processed show clear evidence of a single articulable triggering factor. Thus, many complaints are processed and logged without a triggering factor.

- o Ramadan
- o Dietary needs
- o Hijab
- o Kufi
- o Islamic name
- o Beard
- o Prayer accommodations
- o Ethnicity/Nationality



*The triggering factor that caused the discriminatory action can be difficult to determine, and not all complaints processed show clear evidence of a single articulable triggering factor.*

## KEY FINDINGS, TRENDS, AND STATISTICS

**Percentage of complaints showing evidence of discrimination increased by 10%**

**Hijabs remain the most common triggering factor at 35%**

**Although total calls decreased, the percentage of calls showing evidence of discrimination rose.**

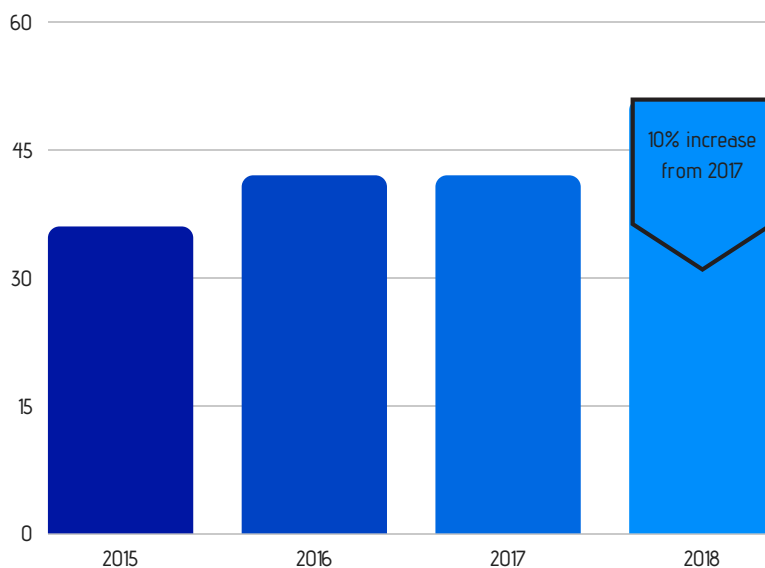
Although 2018 saw a decrease in overall discrimination complaints, there was a dramatic increase in several types of bias incidents.

Employment issues remain one of the highest proportions of total discrimination complaints, consistent with data from 2017 and 2016. School and student issues also increased, although more complaints were successfully resolved through mediation and advocacy than prior years.

Travel and immigration-related complaints decreased in 2018, as much of the uncertainty regarding President Trump's "Muslim Ban" executive orders was resolved by a Supreme Court decision in mid-2018. This decrease is most likely due to fewer immigration applications from Muslim-majority countries, and thus fewer complaints reaching the CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department. Immigration referrals remain the most common type of referral made at our department.

Anti-Muslim harassment, hate crime, and vandalism reports have stayed the same compared to 2017 data, with the most common triggers being hijabs or other religious clothing, halal meal requirements, and prayer accommodations. CAIR-OK is also increasingly working with the Oklahoma Department of Corrections to ensure that incarcerated Muslims are receiving appropriate religious accommodations such as access to halal meals, Friday prayer services, and religious items like Qurans or prayer rugs.

**Percentage of cases showing evidence of discrimination**





## CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS

Throughout 2018, CAIR-OK has continued to grow as the state's foremost Muslim civil rights advocacy organization, placing the Civil Rights Department on the front lines of the fights to retain civil liberties and religious freedom. At every level, we have engaged with community leaders, coalitions, and elected officials to ensure that Oklahoma Muslims are empowered to exercise their rights to speak freely, to associate with those who share common interests, to worship without fear of persecution, and to live and work with full dignity.

### STRENGTHENING GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department has increasingly been involved in the development of the organization's Government Affairs programming, including helping to create our Legislative Agendas, organizing activities at the State Capitol, and keeping the community informed of what's going on with our state's leadership. Our Day of Prayer for our Legislators and annual Muslim Day at the Capitol serve as opportunities for advocacy and lobbying as well as reminders that the Muslim community is a valuable and integral part of the fabric of Oklahoma civic life.





## VOTING FOR OUR FUTURE

Although midterm elections do not garner as much excitement as the Presidential election, they are incredibly important for our community. Leading up to the midterm elections, CAIR-OK issued guides to legislative candidates at multiple levels and encouraged Oklahoma Muslims to vote and take an active role in civic engagement. With much at stake, our community showed up to help win some decisive and historic victories around the country. From volunteering for local campaigns to phone banking on behalf of important causes to distributing CAIR-OK guides to their friends and families, Oklahoma Muslims showed that they are proudly taking action for the future of their communities.

## FRIENDS OF THE COURT, FRIENDS OF CIVIL LIBERTIES

CAIR-OK has signed onto many amicus curiae briefs, or briefs filed on behalf of a party in a major lawsuit that support an interest that is at stake in the lawsuit. By joining these legal coalitions, we show our support for those fighting around the country for immigrants, people of color, and other marginalized group, showing that Oklahoma Muslims care about many issues that affect the most vulnerable of our nation's population.

## CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS (CON.)



### HOUSE CHAPLAIN DISCRIMINATION

In early 2018, we learned that a prominent local imam had been blocked from delivering a prayer to the state House of Representatives. When his decision was challenged, former Representative Chuck Strohm, what the time was head of the chaplaincy program, doubled down on the discrimination, creating a rule that representatives could only nominate someone from their own house of worship to deliver the prayer – effectively barring all minority religions due to the Christian-majority House membership. After lobbying from the Oklahoma Muslim community and our interfaith partners, the policy changed, but ambiguity in the new policy means that the imam has still not been allowed on the House floor to pray for our elected leaders.

### FIRST AMENDMENT ISSUES

Muslims who exercise their First Amendment rights to free speech, association, and access to government have increasingly found themselves the targets of harassment and discrimination. From Muslim students who advocate for the rights of Palestinians to a local imam barred from delivering a prayer at the State House of Representatives, CAIR-OK has always stood for the rights of citizens to express themselves freely without fear of persecution.

## DENIAL OF SERVICE, ACCESS, OR ACCOMMODATION

These complaints involve the denial of service, or access to services, based on discriminatory factors such as the wearing of religious clothing or simply being associated with Islam based on appearance or name. While these cases often stem from ignorance rather than malice, and many can be resolved with a letter or a non-adversarial conversation, litigation occasionally becomes necessary to prevent or discourage discriminatory behavior.



TULSA COUNTY COURTHOUSE

- **TULSA COUNTY COURTHOUSE**

A Tulsa woman and her attorney were hoping to wrap up a difficult court proceeding as they entered the Tulsa County Courthouse. However, the woman was challenged at the security gate and eventually required to remove her headscarf while in sight of men before she could enter the courthouse. CAIR-OK and the ACLU of Oklahoma filed suit against the Tulsa County Sheriff's Office on her behalf, hoping to prevent any other woman from having to be humiliated and exposed in a similar fashion.



## SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

CAIR-OK remains committed to the protection of Muslim students and their right to a safe, protective, and supportive school environment. Unfortunately, Muslim students continue to experience bullying or harassment at higher rates than their non-Muslim peers. However, since the publication of the Educator's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices, student-related complaints have decreased as local schools expand their anti-discrimination curricula and improve their support for Muslim students and their families.

- **MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION**

For the third year in a row, the CAIR-OK Civil Rights Director was invited to present at the Multicultural Education Institute in Edmond, OK. Along with a live presentation, we distributed hundreds of copies of the Educator's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices, sharing both troubling examples of anti-Muslim bullying and positive ways that educators can support a multicultural classroom experience.

- **BACK TO SCHOOL**

As families prepare to head back to school after their summer vacations, the CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department issues a Back to School bulletin outlining students' civil rights in the classroom and encouraging parents to open dialogue with their teachers and administrators. Free copies of the Educator's Guide can help start some of these challenging conversations for teachers and parents at all age levels.



## MEDIA, RESOURCES, AND PUBLICATIONS

CAIR-OK remains at the forefront of organizations that provide resources throughout the state to educate people on the realities of Islam and Muslims in Oklahoma. Our brochures, guides, and other educational materials are widely distributed for free to community members, educators, professionals, and many other groups. We also provide in-person workshops and trainings to reinforce the lessons from our print materials.

- **GUIDES TO ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS PRACTICES**

We now have a series of guides to Islamic religious practices for educators, employers, and healthcare providers. These materials can help clients start challenging conversations and ensure that they receive the accommodations they need.

- **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS**

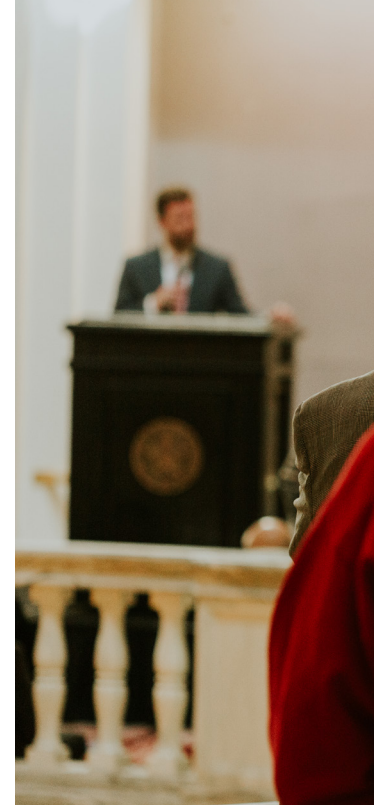
From law enforcement encounters to classrooms to the workplace to the airport, it is important that Muslims know what their civil rights are and how to advocate for themselves. We continue to produce print guides, online materials, and in-person workshops that keep people updated on how to be their own advocates in any situation.

- **ADVOCACY IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

We increasingly rely on technology to spread our messages and deliver important information to our community. Digital town halls that utilize live video streaming are a great way to reach a wide audience and include a wide variety of viewpoints. Webinars allow for a more in-depth look at content, where participants can view from wherever they are located. Facebook Live captures in-the-moment activity in vital places like at the State Capitol, where things can happen quickly. E-newsletters and blog posts allow us to release information in a more detailed format, accessible to our wide internet audience. Thanks to technology and social media, we can reach a wide audience without them having to leave the comfort of home.

To obtain free copies of our Guides to Religious Practices for educators, employers, or healthcare professionals, please visit [cairoklahoma.com/resources](http://cairoklahoma.com/resources) or contact the Civil Rights Department directly.





## ISLAMOPHOBIC PROPAGANDA AND HARASSMENT

### ISLAMOPHOBIC PROPAGANDA

Although social media can be a powerful tool for positive change, it also provides a forum for hateful Islamophobic and racist images and memes as well as harmful misinformation about our community. While some of this content is protected by the First Amendment, we carefully consider the impact that it has on the real world and are prepared to step in where it becomes dangerously unlawful. We encourage you to report Islamophobic propaganda to the CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department, particularly when it is shared by a person in a public position such as a teacher, elected official, or prominent community leader. We also work to educate our allies in the interfaith and social justice communities on how to respond to Islamophobic propaganda, teaching people how to stand up for one another in a respectful way.

#### • WHITE SUPREMACY FLYERS

Various reports of flyers touting white supremacy or white nationalism emerged across Oklahoma in 2018, particularly in college towns and near universities. Even if such materials do not directly target the Muslim community, we encourage any person who sees these flyers to document it in person and report it to CAIR-OK before attempting to remove the flyer. By tracking the spread of hateful propaganda in our state, we can determine where our efforts are most needed and educate local citizens on how to instill love, support, and respect in their communities.

Although the First Amendment permits the expression of many different views and opinions, even those which may be found objectionable, CAIR-OK does not support hate speech or incitement to violence, regardless of who is being targeted. We encourage citizens to replace hateful messaging with education, tolerance, and respect for one another.



## HARASSMENT

Complaints of harassment against Muslims have consistently been a serious issue for the Oklahoma Muslim community. Muslim women, particularly those who choose to wear hijab, are targets of shouting, threats, and even violence. From social media to parking lots to simply walking down a street, this harassment is an attempt to intimidate and frighten, to deny Muslims full participation in civic life. CAIR-OK monitors incidents as they are reported to us, educates law enforcement and allies on how best to respond to anti-Muslim harassment, and supports community members who have been victimized by hatred and ignorance. In 2018, we have also expanded our record-keeping to include incidents of harassment or hatred against other religious minorities, such as anti-Semitic propaganda.

### • “PUNISH A MUSLIM DAY”

In the UK, an anonymous letter was circulated that promised April 3 as “Punish a Muslim Day.” The graphic letter stated that people could win “points” for a variety of hateful acts against Muslims, including physical assault and pulling off a woman’s hijab. The letter showed up in the U.S. via social media, but very little credible information emerged that it would be carried out among our communities. After carefully reviewing all the information and sharing our concerns with local law enforcement, we determined that there was no threat. Oklahoma saw no documented violence or activity associated with “Punish a Muslim Day,” and the sender of the hateful document was arrested in the UK.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE FACED WITH HARASSMENT:

- **Do not engage.** Perpetrators of harassment will often subside if they see they are not getting a response. Try to ignore the perpetrator and instead reach a safe place.
- **Record the incident.** If you have a cell phone or other device with video recording capability, use it if you are able to do so. Video footage of an event can be vital in helping determine who is at fault after the fact.
- **Enlist help.** Store management, security officers, or even passersby can step in to help get you away from a harasser. Ask a specific person to help you rather than just asking generally.
- **Call the police.** While the police often cannot help in the moment, a police report can help establish that you felt unsafe and concerned and can set up a record of the perpetrator’s behavior for future legal action.
- **Report to CAIR-OK.** Every report to our office helps us track the spread of Islamophobia in our communities. You can call, email, or use the website reporting form; none of your information will be made public without your consent.



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

## ISLAMOPHOBIA IN OKLAHOMA

One of the most important parts of researching trends in anti-Muslim bias is the ability to share our data with others in a way that encourages meaningful allyship and support. The CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department maintains presentations and workshops that explain the roots and history of Islamophobia in our state in a format that encourages non-Muslim audiences to take part in the fight for religious tolerance in all Oklahoma communities. From libraries to college campuses to nonprofit organizations, we make sure that all are prepared to stop Islamophobia wherever it may occur.



## CAIR OKLAHOMA AROUND THE COUNTRY

In order to stay up-to-date on the most recent changes to civil rights law, the CAIR-OK Civil Rights Director travels around the country to learn from leaders in the field and to share Oklahoma's successes with our neighbors. From small towns in Arkansas to our nation's Capital in Washington, D.C., the CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department makes a big impression wherever our organization is seen.



## CIVIL RIGHTS VIDEOS

In order to reinforce the data from the 2017 Civil Rights Report, we joined with a team of videographers to create a series of Civil Rights Videos that were distributed via social media. These short videos featured the Civil Rights Director discussing some of the challenges and triumphs of the previous year and pointing to the importance of civil rights advocacy.

## BYSTANDER INTERVENTION TRAINING

This program remains one of our most popular workshops among our interfaith friends. Using principles of nonviolence and peaceful advocacy, this training teaches how to safely intervene in the event of public harassment. The Civil Rights Director has delivered this training to audiences in many industries, helping to create a generation of peaceful intervenors who are prepared to stand up for others.

To bring a Bystander Intervention Training to your community, contact the Civil Rights Department to schedule a workshop.



## INTERSECTIONAL ACTIVISM

CAIR-OK has long recognized that advocacy requires learning from different perspectives and considering the many ways that oppression and privilege affect the ways we interact with the world. We engage with coalition leaders in a variety of areas to help us better understand how to be allies with our other marginalized friends.

- **BLACK HISTORY MONTH AND BEYOND**

Although Black History Month is a great time for anti-racism programming, we remain committed to racial justice at all times throughout the year.

- **POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY**

Oklahomans experience poverty at disturbingly high rates. One in four Oklahoma children faces food insecurity, meaning that they do not know for certain where their next meal will come from. Our Ramadan Day of Service at the Regional Food Bank reminds us that we must always serve the least fortunate of our communities.

- **GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS**

The growth of the CAIR-OK Government Affairs mission has shown that the Oklahoma Muslim community cares about many issues targeting the Oklahoma community as a whole. When public school teachers walked out to protest years of irresponsible budget cuts to education funding, we joined them in support. We have also encouraged our community to lobby for the development of responsible financial policy and for criminal justice reforms that can transform our standing as a state that incarcerates more people than any other. We know that our state cannot succeed unless all our citizens are equipped with the tools for a safe, fulfilled life, and we push for responsible governmental policies that work for all Oklahomans.





## LEADERSHIP

The CAIR-OK Civil Rights Department has long been recognized as one of the foremost authorities on civil rights in the state of Oklahoma. We are committed to setting a clear example for our youth, educating our allies on the issues facing our community, and modeling allyship and support for other communities who face prejudice, discrimination, and bigotry.

### YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

CAIR-OK launched our Muslim Young Professionals Network (MYPN) in 2018 as a means to engage young Muslims in civic engagement, community leadership, and personal empowerment. Although the program is young, we have more than 100 members who are committed to growing opportunities for themselves and their peers, sharing ideas and opportunities in a forum that uniquely appreciates their contributions and talents. The Civil Rights Department is integral in developing programming for our young professionals that empowers a new generation of civil rights leaders, activists, and advocates in many fields.

### LEGAL INTERNS

Legal interns are invaluable to the work of the Civil Rights Department. 2018 Legal Interns served during the Spring, Summer, and Fall terms to assist in programming, meet with clients, develop new materials, and help us respond to the needs of a busy department. Our legal interns graduate the internship equipped with the skills that make them not just successful legal practitioners, but as caring, compassionate stewards of the best of the legal tradition.

### CIVIL RIGHTS INTERN

In 2018, the Civil Rights Department piloted a Civil Rights Internship for a student outside the field of law to get hands-on experience with civil rights advocacy. Aimed at undergraduate students, the program is ideal for students in any field who are interested in civil rights research, community advocacy, and professional development.



## HONORING SERVICE

CAIR-OK has been honored over the past years to receive prestigious recognition for our accomplishments. We are proud to showcase the work that places us among the most stalwart champions of justice in our community, our state, and our nation.

### 2018 CHAPTER OF THE YEAR

Out of 36 CAIR chapters in 28 states, CAIR-OK was named the CAIR Chapter of the Year, recognizing the outstanding work that makes us a leader among our national peers. We were selected for many reasons, including our outreach with local elected officials, our youth leadership programs that strengthen the next generation of leaders, and our print materials that are now in use in many states other than Oklahoma. We were honored to accept the award in Washington, D.C., on behalf of our many supporters who make our work possible.

### WOMEN TRAILBLAZERS

To commemorate 100 years of women's suffrage in Oklahoma, the League of Women Voters selected 100 notable women throughout Oklahoma's history as trailblazers of courage. CAIR-OK Civil Rights Director Veronica Laizure earned a spot among the roster of 100 Women Trailblazers, alongside other powerful women such as civil rights activist Clara Luper, who led one of the first lunch counter sit-ins in Oklahoma City, and Angie Debo, a noted historian who brought to light the many human rights violations suffered by the Oklahoma Native American community.





# OKLAHOMA



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