

OPEN LETTER

Richmond School District
7811 Granville Avenue
Richmond, BC
V6Y 3E3

May 14, 2025

RE: A Call to Combat Islamophobia in the Richmond School District

Dear Trustees and Esteemed Members of the Richmond School Board District 38,

Islamophobia and Anti Palestinian racism is a growing and deeply concerning issue in Richmond schools, affecting the safety, belonging, and educational experiences of Muslim students. As advocates for Muslim families and youth in this community, we call on the Richmond School District to acknowledge the seriousness of this problem and to take immediate, meaningful action to address it through accountable leadership and systemic change.¹

The Government of Canada has formally acknowledged Islamophobia as a unique form of systemic discrimination and a public safety concern.² According to the National Council of Canadian Muslims, Canada has seen a dramatic surge in anti-Muslim violence, with a 1,300% rise in hate incidents against Muslims and Palestinians in late 2023 alone.³ Hauntingly, Canada now leads the G7 in deadly Islamophobic attacks.⁴ Institutions reflect and reinforce societal attitudes, so as Islamophobia intensifies in public discourse, its impact is felt in schools, workplaces, and public institutions.⁵

The prevalence of Islamophobia in schools is well-documented in both research and the lived experiences of Muslim communities across Canada. The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights (2023) has confirmed that Islamophobia is widespread in Canadian educational institutions and that Muslim students face persistent barriers, discrimination, and a lack of institutional response.¹² In 2016, over one third of Muslim students in Canada, and over half of adults reported being victimized due to their religious beliefs⁶. As geo-political tensions and anti-immigration sentiment have intensified over the last decade, this number may be greatly disproportionate. Muslim students have reported physical and verbal bullying, witnessed the propagation of stereotypes by students and teachers, have been silenced when expressing their religious beliefs, and have felt unsupported in accommodations to practice their faith.

Islamophobia in education has direct, measurable effects on student health and academic outcomes. Studies show that discrimination and racism increase risk for anxiety, depression, PTSD, and suicidal ideation in racialized youth.⁸ The lack of belonging and chronic stress caused by unaddressed Islamophobia contributes to higher dropout rates, academic disengagement, and

poorer mental and physical health, further disadvantaging a community already experiencing poorer health and economic outcomes.⁹ As a direct result of Islamophobia, Muslim families in Richmond have increasingly withdrawn from public schools due to overt exclusion and discrimination.¹⁰

Both the Government of Canada's National Action Plan on Combating Hate and British Columbia's K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan explicitly identify Islamophobia as a form of systemic discrimination,¹¹ Yet Richmond School District has not implemented any targeted measures to address it. This is a critical gap.

We are calling on the district to take immediate steps to become a provincial leader in educational equity by developing an Anti-Islamophobia Strategy that aims to address Islamophobia in all its forms—interpersonal, systemic, and structural:

- 1. Affirm Islamophobia as a distinct and rising form of discrimination**
- 2. Study Islamophobia and muslim student & staff experience within the District and establish accessible mechanisms for the documentation and reporting of Islamophobic incidents.**
- 3. Develop and implement an anti-racism assessment framework to identify and reform policies, programs, and services that may perpetuate Islamophobia**
- 4. Establish mandatory anti-Islamophobia training for all staff, volunteers, and contractors, with clear standards, targets, and accountability measures;**
- 5. Revise or replace existing practices that create barriers for Muslim students and families, and proactively design inclusive policies that promote safety and belonging**
- 6. Set and monitor targets for the recruitment, retention, and advancement of racialized individuals—into staff and leadership roles**
- 7. Center Muslim voices in decision-making, ensuring that policies and practices are shaped by lived experience, community consultation, and transparent dialogue.**

Islamophobia has a negative impact on the identity, well-being, and outcomes of Muslim-identifying students, families, staff, and community. This impact is compounded for Muslims with intersecting marginalized identities. As Islamophobia is systemic, and is deeply embedded in public institutions, these actions are not optional—they are essential to fulfilling the district's stated values of inclusion, respect, and safety.

This is a defining moment. As Richmond School District sets its five-year strategic plan, there is an opportunity—and a responsibility—to confront Islamophobia head-on. Muslim students should not have to internalize discrimination as normal, or be made to feel invisible in the place where they are meant to learn and grow. The time has come to acknowledge that Islamophobic discrimination exists in our schools and is actively harming children. With clarity, courage, and care, the district can lead with integrity—co-authoring a future rooted in genuine equity, safety, and belonging for all students.

With Sincerity,

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INTERNATIONAL
REFUGEES SUPPORT FOUNDATION

Nusrat Haq

International Refugees Support Foundation

References

1. National Council of Canadian Muslims. (2022). Islamophobia in Canada: A Report Card.
2. Government of Canada. (2022). Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2019-2022.
3. National Council of Canadian Muslims. (2023). Islamophobia in the Aftermath of Global Conflict: Incident Reporting Data.
4. CBC News. (2023). Canada leads G7 in deadly Islamophobic attacks, report finds.
5. OHRC. (2018). Policy on preventing discrimination based on creed.
6. Environics Institute. (2016). Survey of Muslims in Canada.
8. Canadian Pediatric Society. (2019). Impact of racism on child and youth health.
9. Public Health Agency of Canada. (2020). Social determinants of health and racism.
10. Community consultations with Muslim parents in Richmond, 2025. Appendix A
11. Government of Canada. (2024). National Action Plan on Combatting Hate; Government of British Columbia. (2023). K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan.
12. Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights. (2023). Islamophobia in Canada: A Threat to Our Social Fabric. Senate of Canada.

APPENDIX A

Richmond Community Consultations- Student & Parent Experiences 2025

“Because I am Muslim and wear hijab, my classmates call me a “terrorist”. My teacher never does anything about it”. Grade 6 Student, Richmond BC

“The only times Muslims were brought up in the school curriculum was during a lesson about 9-11, and on a PowerPoint slide of men in turbans with the heading “terrorist government “ Grade 7 Student, Richmond BC

“No student should feel that their existence, culture, or pain is too controversial to be acknowledged. Schools must be spaces where all children can feel seen, heard, and safe—without exception.” Parent, Richmond BC

“My son's teacher told him that if he were to go “back home”, he would probably be dead.” Parent, Richmond BC

“ Personally, I’ve been on the receiving end of discriminatory remarks. Insults like “terrorist” and “bomber” are used casually by some students when they find out someone is Arab or Muslim. What’s more disheartening is that some continue using these terms even after being told how offensive and hurtful they are.” High School Student, Richmond BC

“ There is no room for Muslim exceptionalism in the educational system, whereby students are only made to feel welcome so long as they conform. Inclusion should not come at the expense of the exclusion of others.” Parent, Richmond BC

“In an economics class debate, I presented the benefits of a taxation system of a Middle Eastern country. My teacher went on a monologue about “freedom” and “women’s rights”.” Grade 7 Student, Richmond BC

“A social studies teacher once described Muslim women in the early 20th century who removed the hijāb as becoming “free,” projecting a biased and Islamophobic narrative.” High School Student, Richmond BC

“I don’t pray at school even though I want to. My parents are afraid the teachers or kids will judge me. Plus- there isn’t anywhere to pray privately, and I’m too shy to ask.” Grade 6 student, Richmond BC

“I’ve personally heard from several Muslims who feel pressured to “tone down” their Islamic dress due to fear of harassment or verbal abuse. Some even feel that wearing garments like the ‘Abayah, Jilbāb, Khimār, or Niqāb may lead to physical harm or at least derogatory comment”. Grade 12 Student, Richmond BC

“I pulled my three children out of Richmond Public school due to bullying and an intolerant atmosphere. I have friends that have left the country because they didn’t want their children feeling as though they were different and less worthy of respect.” Parent, Richmond BC

APPENDIX B

Policy & Resources

Policy

- [The Canadian Guide to Understanding and Combatting Islamophobia: For a more inclusive Canada](#)
- [Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights: Combatting Hate: Islamophobia and its Impact on Muslims in Canada](#)
- [British Columbia Anti-Racism Act](#)
- [Attorney General: Joint Statement on National Summit of Islamophobia](#)

Resources

- [National Council of Canadian Muslims](#)
The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan, grassroots human rights & civil liberties organization.
- [Islamophobia: An Educators Guide](#)
The 'Islamophobia is' video series aims to foster an understanding of, and commitment to addressing, Islamophobia in its breadth and depth, among youth and non-youth alike. This guide is designed to enhance the educational and social impact of the video series among students in grades 6-12, while also contributing to students' broader learning outcomes
- [Affirming Muslim Student Identities and Dismantling Islamophobia Strategy](#) The Peel District School Board is the first school board in Canada to embark on creating a strategy to affirm Muslim identities and dismantle Islamophobia. It is in direct response to the Review of the Peel District School Board (2020) which recognized that Islamophobia is an area of concern in the Peel District School Board
- [Islamophobia and its impact on Muslims in Canada](#)
The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights report highlights numerous personal experiences as well as evidence and expert perspectives presented to the committee, pointing to the need for urgent action to reverse the alarming trajectory of Islamophobia in Canada.
- [The Canadian Islamophobia Industry](#)
The Islamophobia Studies Center maps (a) the political, ideological, institutional, and economic networks that foment Islamophobic fear and moral panic in Canada; (b) examine strategies employed by Islamophobia agents and highlight the ties among players within the Islamophobia industry; (c) create profiles of key public figures, media outlets, and organizations who produce and distribute Islamophobic ideologies and propaganda, and (d) identify the dominant Islamophobic discourses that circulate through these networks.
- [Islamophobia through the eyes of Muslims](#)
The Othering & Belonging Institute developed and administered this national survey between October 14 and November 2, 2020, among the US Muslim population (citizens and noncitizen residents who live and/ or work in the US) to understand the

prevalence of Islamophobia in the US. In so doing, we intentionally set the survey to assess Islamophobia's prevalence from the perspectives of those who bear the brunt of its effects on their daily lives. Additionally, the study sought to account for the diversity of US Muslims and sought to assess their societal engagement, worldviews, and belonging as they navigate their lives in the US.

- **The Muslim population in Canada - Infographic**

The Office of the Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia and Statistics Canada have developed an infographic that provides an overview of the diversity and demographic characteristics of the Muslim population in Canada. Using data from the 2001 and 2021 Census of Population data (2001 and 2021), it explores topics such as the distribution of the Muslim population by province and territory and by age group, the main racialized groups, the top countries of birth, and the top languages most often spoken at home by the Muslim population in Canada.

- **Anti-muslim hate crimes — Addressing the security needs of Muslim communities: A practical guide**

This guide is a tool for law enforcement, public safety officials, policymakers, community organizations and others who are committed to address hate against Muslim communities in Canada. The guide is available online in 10 languages.

- **10 steps to turn policies into action — Infographic**

In September 2022, the Office of the Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, the Canadian Commission of UNESCO, and the Government of Canada's Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat collaborated in launching this guide in Canada.

- **Muslims in Canada Archives (MiCA)**

MiCA is an initiative of the Institute of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto, in collaboration with several partners. It is an archive collection to document and share the history and experiences of Muslims in Canada.