Written Statement for the Record  
by Salam Al-Marayati  
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before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
on Responses to the Increase in Religious Hate Crimes

Mr. Chairman, Senator Feinstein, and distinguished Members of the Committee. The Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) applauds the Senate Judiciary Committee for holding a hearing on “Responses to the Increase in Religious Hate Crimes” at a time when the topic could not be more relevant. Since 1988, MPAC has advocated consistently for the civil liberties of American Muslims, for the defense of religious liberties, and for common sense policies that live up to our nation’s greatest ideals of justice for all.

No community should have to exist in a state of constant fear because of their perceived religious beliefs. And yet, for many American Muslim families across the nation, that is their daily reality. In just the past two years, there have been countless instances of mosques being vandalized and sometimes literally burned to the ground, children harassed and bullied by both classmates and teachers, and average citizens attacked - sometimes fatally - by their fellow Americans, simply because of their faith.

Given the diversity of the American Muslim community, many members also face daily bigotry on multiple fronts at the same time. African-American Muslim teenagers report assailants screaming the n-word while at the same time trying to rip their headscarves off. LGBT Muslims often suffer at the intersection of Islamophobia and homophobia. Their experiences demonstrate that hate is neither compartmentalized nor exclusive.

The evidence is clear that such hate-based incidents against American Muslims have spiked considerably. In 2015, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported a 67% increase in hate crimes against American Muslims, the highest level of violence against the community since the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001. Media reports and tracking from nonpartisan organizations point to an exponential increase in such attacks since then.

While the available data is clearly disturbing, it also remains woefully incomplete. Advocates have long pushed Congress and the Department of Justice and its agencies to improve the reporting, tracking, and handling of hate crimes. In a 2014 speech to the Anti-Defamation League, FBI Director James Comey himself confirmed this when he said “we need to do a better job of tracking and reporting hate crime to fully understand what is happening in our communities and how to stop it. There are jurisdictions that fail to report hate crime statistics. Other jurisdictions claim there were no hate crimes in their community—a fact that would be welcome if true. We must continue to impress upon our state and local counterparts in every jurisdiction the need to track and report hate crime. It is not something we can ignore or sweep under the rug.”

It is for that reason that MPAC joined the ADL in working closely with Senators Harris, Feinstein, Collins, Rubio, and Duckworth to introduce a bipartisan resolution acknowledging the rise in hate crimes and providing concrete policy recommendations. The unanimous passage of this resolution by the Senate was a heartening recognition that our communities are more in need than ever. We commend the Senate for this important milestone and implore the House to pass a similar resolution.
More importantly, we call on Congress, the Department of Justice, and the White House to follow through on the recommendations made. We call on the DOJ and other Federal agencies to establish new policies that “improve the reporting of hate crimes” and “emphasize the importance of the agencies’ collection and reporting of data pursuant to Federal law”. We also call on the Attorney General to immediately establish an “interagency task force to collaborate on the development of effective strategies and efforts to detect and deter hate crime to protect minority communities”.

All members of this committee voted in favor of these common-sense recommendations. We therefore urge all members to translate that shared sense of purpose into swift action that meaningfully pushes back against the tide of hate crimes that threatens to overtake our most marginalized communities.

Finally, MPAC applauds the inclusion of voices like Vanita Gupta, who has been a tireless advocate for the civil rights of marginalized communities; Dr. Prabhjot Singh, who personally experienced a hate crime due solely to his perceived faith; and the Anti-Defamation League, which has stood as firmly against Islamophobia as it has anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, we must express disappointment in the lack of direct inclusion of American Muslim voices on the witness panel. MPAC regularly partners with communities of different faiths or identities, but who often face the same challenges of xenophobia and bigotry. We are always grateful for the opportunity to learn from one another and only grow stronger by joining together. It is our hope that this committee, and all members, will carry on that same spirit of inclusion in future hearings and individual meetings.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Feinstein, and Members of the Committee, together we will push back against hate, fear, and ignorance, and ensure a more open and tolerant America for all.