

In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.



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October 15, 2025

The Honorable Scott Bessent
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretary Bessent:

I write on behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) in response to an October 14, 2025, letter from U.S. Senator Tom Cotton and Rep. Elise Stefanik that urges the Treasury Department to pursue a baseless investigation into our civil rights group.

CAIR is our nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. Founded in 1994, CAIR is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Our mission is to enhance the public's understanding of Islam, protect civil rights, promote justice and empower American Muslims.

With 25 chapters, dozens of attorneys, hundreds of staff and board members, and support from thousands of donors across America, CAIR has spent four decades advancing free speech, religious freedom, and racial equality. In 2024, CAIR won a 9-0 ruling from the Supreme Court in a historic lawsuit meant to protect all Americans from discrimination.¹

In addition to countering anti-Muslim bigotry, CAIR vocally opposes anti-Black racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, and other forms of hate.² CAIR also speaks out against injustice around the world, from illegal wars to terrorism to ethnic cleansing to genocide. In fact, CAIR has spoken up against terrorism³ so often that ISIS once targeted us.^{4 5}

¹ "Supreme Court unanimously rules against government in No Fly List case," The Hill. March 13, 2024.

² "CAIR: A Principled and Consistent Force Against Antisemitism," CAIR. 2023.

<https://www.cair.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/HistoryofCAIRDefendingJewishCommunity.pdf>

³ "Dispelling Rumors About CAIR," CAIR. 2009. "We unequivocally condemn all acts of terrorism, whether carried out by al-Qa'ida, the Real IRA, FARC, Hamas, ETA, or any other group designated...as a 'Foreign Terrorist Organization.'"

⁴ "Dispelling Rumors About CAIR," CAIR. "In 2016, CAIR's National Executive Director Nihad Awad was included in an ISIS list of Muslim leaders it opposed."

⁵ "100+ Muslim Scholars, Leaders Issue Open Letter Refuting ISIS," CAIR. Sep. 23, 2024.

CAIR has strongly opposed the Israeli government's violent, racist oppression of the Palestinian people and CAIR has also opposed violence against Israeli civilians, from such attacks on Oct. 7th, 2023,⁶ to the wave of suicide bombings that began in the 1990s.⁷ This has been CAIR's principled and morally consistent position for 31 years.

To be very clear, CAIR is not and has never been an agent, affiliate, offshoot, subsidiary, supporter, partner, funder, representative, supporter, or pen pal of any foreign militant group. CAIR is funded by the American people. In any given year, less than one percent of donations to CAIR come from individuals based abroad, mostly in Canada.

Senator Cotton and Rep. Stefanik's letter ignores these clear facts and instead regurgitates long-debunked conspiracy theories⁸ and guilt-by-association smears⁹ to demand a baseless, McCarthy-era witch hunt into our organization.

For example, their letter mentions the Bush administration's improper listing of over 250 organizations as unindicted coconspirators in the deeply flawed and widely criticized trial of the Holy Land Foundation. The government's baseless smear of those groups, including CAIR, was ruled unconstitutional by the Fifth Circuit in 2010.¹⁰

The letter also references comments that CAIR National Executive Director Nihad Awad made in a speech in 2023, but ignores the fact that he clarified his remarks and affirmed his agreement with CAIR's position: opposition to all forms of unjust violence, including attacks on Israeli civilians on Oct. 7th.¹¹

We understand why Senator Cotton and Rep. Stefanik, major recipients of funding from the Israel lobby group AIPAC,^{12 13} oppose our support for Palestinian human rights. That is their constitutional right as Americans. However, they do not have the right to trigger witch hunts into other Americans simply because we exercise our own First Amendment right to oppose the genocide in Gaza.

⁶ "CAIR Reaffirms Condemnation of Oct. 7th Attacks on Civilians," Dec. 23, 2023.

https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-reaffirms-condemnation-of-oct-7th-attacks-on-civilians/

⁷ <https://www.cair.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/HistoryofCAIRDefendingJewishCommunity.pdf>

⁸ The Global Muslim Brotherhood Conspiracy," Sep. 19, 2017. The Bridge Initiative, Georgetown University. <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/the-global-muslim-brotherhood-conspiracy-theory>

⁹ The New York Times, March 14, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/14/washington/14cair.html> (Government officials in Washington...described the standards used by critics to link CAIR to terrorism as akin to McCarthyism, essentially guilt by association).

¹⁰ "Blocking Faith, Freezing Charity," ACLU. June 2009. <https://www.aclu.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/blockingfaith.pdf>

¹¹ "As a Muslim, I condemn attacks on all civilians. President Biden should, too." Religion News Service. Dec. 22, 2023. <https://religionnews.com/2023/12/22/as-a-muslim-i-condemn-attacks-on-both-israeli-and-palestinian-civilians-president-biden-should-too/>

¹² Elise Stefanik, Track AIPAC. (\$983,055). <https://www.trackaipac.com/states/newyork?rq=elise%20stefanik>

¹³ Tom Cotton, Track AIPAC (\$1,378,529) <https://www.trackaipac.com/states/arkansas?rq=tom%20cotton>

Their request that the Treasury Department target our civil rights organization has no basis in fact or law, nothing to do with national security, and everything to do with anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian bigotry.

In fact, this is not the first time Senator Cotton has sought to weaponize federal agencies against our organization. In August 2025, he sent a nearly identical letter to the Internal Revenue Service demanding a baseless investigation into CAIR's tax status, a request that was similarly without merit or legal foundation.

We therefore urge the Department of the Treasury to reject these demands and maintain its commitment to neutral, evidence-based oversight. Furthermore, we encourage the Department of the Treasury and other relevant federal agencies to investigate whether Senator Cotton or Representative Stefanik's consistent lobbying for the benefit of the Israeli government has violated statutes governing bribery or the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

Specifically, such an inquiry should determine whether either official promised the Israeli government, AIPAC or other affiliated entities that it would demand federal investigations into American organizations that opposed Israel's genocide in Gaza in exchange for campaign contributions, free travel, or other items of value.

In the meantime, CAIR will - God willing - continue protecting the civil rights of all Americans, including American Muslims, and opposing injustice here and abroad.

Thank you for your service and for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert S. McCaw". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" and last name "McCaw" being clearly legible.

Robert S. McCaw
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