

**STATE OF ILLINOIS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
MUSLIM AMERICAN ADVISORY COUNCIL**



**FIRST SEMIANNUAL REPORT
JUNE 30, 2013**

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Letter from the Co-Chairs



Who Is My Muslim Neighbor? Elgin, IL



Illinois Muslim ACTION! Day Springfield, IL



Health Care Rally Chicago, IL

Dear Governor Quinn,

It gives us great pleasure to submit the first semiannual report of your Muslim American Advisory Council (“MAAC” or “the Council”), the first public body of its kind in the nation.

Your commitment to the inclusion and empowerment of religious minorities is a testament of your visionary leadership, a reflection of core American values and a model that elected officials across our nation ought to emulate.

**“Everybody in. Nobody left out.”
– Governor Quinn**

Muslim Americans comprise the third largest religious group in Illinois and have made countless contributions to our State – from designing signature buildings (for example, Willis Tower and John Hancock) to actively participating in its civil rights movement. Muslim Americans are an integral part of Illinois. They are our doctors, our business partners, our teachers, our neighbors and last but not least our fellow Illinoisans.

This report is a call for partnership and positive engagement. It offers recommendations in policy areas that are most important to Illinois Muslims such as public safety and community and economic development. Muslim Americans want safer neighborhoods, better education and employment opportunities for all youth, affordable healthcare and a prosperous Illinois economy.

On behalf of MAAC Members, thank you, Governor Quinn, for establishing and supporting the Council.

Respectfully submitted,

Kareem M. Irfan, Esq.
Co-Chair

Sohair Omar
Co-Chair

Recommendations

Public Safety

- ❖ **Partner with faith-based communities to reduce violence and youth unemployment in Illinois.** As stated in House Resolution 1003 of the 97th General Assembly, faith-based organizations play a critical role in preventing and intervening in cycles of youth violence around the country. Muslim Americans and our faith partners are equally impacted by the negative effects of youth violence and strongly desire to collaborate with Governor Quinn, the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority and others to end this epidemic. For example, a pilot program that links at-risk youth with permanent employment at local businesses through pre-employment training, counseling and mentoring ought to be developed and implemented by all parties at stake.
- ❖ **Expand and increase funding for youth employment programs.** Jobs for youth, a key component of Governor Quinn’s anti-violence strategy, must be equally accessible to faith-based organizations and available year-round. The current youth employment program administered by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity is limited to one season (summer) and does not provide adequate opportunities for faith-based organizations to apply. Partnering with faith-based organizations in collaboration with local businesses on expanding the current youth employment program will require additional resources. Additionally, graduates of the existing youth employment program ought to be trained, counseled and mentored until they find permanent employment. Muslim-owned businesses located in at-risk communities have expressed an interest in participating in and contributing to such programs.
- ❖ **End racial and religious profiling and intrusive surveillance.** The Muslim American community is opposed – as is the Illinois General Assembly (via Senate Bill 1587 of the 98th General Assembly) – to unwarranted drone surveillance or any other measure that infringes upon our or any other racial or religious groups’ fundamental constitutional rights; and encourages Governor Quinn to sign Senate Bill 1587, which mandates important drone-related surveillance safeguards, into law.
- ❖ **Block the expansion of gambling in Illinois.** The disruptive social and financial impact of gambling on individuals, families and communities outweigh any estimate of potential tax revenue. The Muslim American community commends and stands by Governor Quinn in his opposition to gambling expansion legislation.

Recommendations

Economic Development

- ❖ **Coordinate trade promotion activities with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other member-based organizations.** To tap markets in MENASA plus SEA (Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and South East Asia), especially those fast-growing economies of the Persian/Arab Gulf, the Illinois Office of Trade and Investment must continue to engage them and organizations that represent them in areas of construction (e.g., GCC rail projects and 2012 FIFA World Cup in Qatar), healthcare and education.
- ❖ **Host a series of “Why Illinois” seminars in partnership with foreign consulates and large companies to attract foreign direct investment.** A pitch book highlighting the competitive advantages of Illinois must be developed, presented and provided to business persons and groups travelling to and from Illinois and foreign markets.
- ❖ **Designate an employee at the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to focus on trade and higher education linkages.** To bolster trade relationships, strategic partnerships between Illinois public and private universities and universities and medical and research centers abroad (e.g., King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia) must be identified and created.
- ❖ **Create a State-level Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program.** A focus on innovation and entrepreneurship is key to the long-term, economic success of Illinois. Using the SBIR program administered by the U.S. Small Business Administration as a model, Illinois should create a research grant program for small businesses to spur technological innovation and commercialize State-funded investments.

Government Services

- ❖ **Expand outreach to Muslim American community in Illinois.** Muslim American households and businesses are generally unaware of opportunities to partner with the State. Through the creation of MAAC, Governor Quinn has empowered MAAC Members to conduct outreach on behalf of the State. Relying on the extensive networks of MAAC Members, Illinois State agencies must also reach out to mosques (or masjids) and Islamic centers and institutions, especially when community and economic development and public safety is concerned.

Recommendations

Human Services

- ❖ **Continue to fund immigrant and refugee services programs.** To achieve Governor Quinn's goal of making Illinois the most welcoming State in the nation, funding for the Immigrant Family Resource Program, the New American Initiative and other comparable programs cannot be compromised. Many Illinois Muslims have migrated to the U.S. from strife-torn countries and are dependent on temporary assistance while they integrate into American society.

Healthcare

- ❖ **Expand access to affordable healthcare in Illinois.** Muslim Americans are the most racially diverse religious group in America, where no race represents a majority. Since race rather than religious affiliation is a predictor of income, access to affordable healthcare is a serious problem for the indigenous African American subgroup of Illinois Muslims. They are disproportionately represented in uninsured and underinsured categories and, therefore, should be specifically targeted by Health Insurance Marketplace outreach efforts. Additionally, all Muslim Americans can benefit from special accommodations by healthcare providers with regards to cultural and linguistic barriers and cross-gender interaction in clinical and hospital settings.

Education

- ❖ **Increase cultural and global understanding through education.** To increase the competitiveness of Illinois' workforce, the State must continue to fund programs, such as the Arts and Foreign Language Implementation and Planning Assistance Grants Program administered by the Illinois Arts Council and the Illinois State Board of Education, that help Illinois students learn about world cultures and languages, including but not limited to Arabic.

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