

June 8, 2017

Mayor Will Sessoms  
2401 Courthouse Dr # 234  
Virginia Beach, VA 23456  
[wsessoms@vbgov.com](mailto:wsessoms@vbgov.com)

Dear Mayor Sessoms,

We write to ask you to join us in publicly embracing our nation's core values of pluralism, diversity, and liberty for all while firmly rejecting the forces of hate and bigotry that seek to divide us.

As you may be aware, ACT for America, the nation's largest anti-Muslim hate group, has called for a protest in Virginia Beach as part of a coordinated series of [protests in over 20 cities across the nation](#) on June 10th. Timed during the Islamic month of Ramadan when Muslims around the world fast during the daylight hours, these protests have been disingenuously branded "March Against Sharia" and explicitly target Muslims at a time when hatred and bigotry has swept the nation.

ACT's founder, Brigitte Gabriel, regularly vilifies Muslims, claiming that practicing Muslims cannot be loyal to the United States. She also once said that "every practicing Muslim is a radical Muslim" and that Muslims are a "natural threat to civilized people of the world, particularly Western society." Both she and ACT have had a long history of promoting policies at the federal and state levels intended to manufacture fear of Muslims, and the group has been named a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

We are deeply concerned about the type of message that these protests send to the American public and to the good people in your city--that it is acceptable to vilify people simply because of their faith.

Between 2014 and 2015, FBI data indicates that hate crimes against Muslims increased by 67%. Bias-motivated violence continues to target Muslims, Arabs, South Asians, and a number of other communities. Just this year alone there have been numerous murders of individuals who are Muslim or were targeted based on anti-Muslim bigotry, regardless of their religion. In addition, several mosques around the country have been targeted by arson. Negative misperceptions of Muslims have also resulted in children being the target of bullying and harassment across the country--one poll conducted by the Institute for

**Social Policy and Understanding suggests that more than forty percent of Muslim children in grades K-12 are bullied because of their faith.**

**Now, more than ever, we must come together and support one another from viewpoints and groups that seek to divide us.**

**We, the undersigned national and local civil rights, faith-based, and community organizations, ask that you use your voice as an elected representative of your city to reject bigotry. We urge you to issue an official statement to reiterate to the people of your city that every person is welcome and has the right to feel secure regardless of how they worship, where they're from, or who they love. Furthermore, we ask that you recognize that American Muslims have been an essential part of America's fabric since before our nation was founded. The members of your community, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, must be reassured that bigotry, hatred, and prejudice against any individual or group based on their faith, gender, ethnicity, nationality, race, sexual orientation, or disability status will not be tolerated.**

**We look forward to hearing from you and hope that we can work closely with you in the future to positively engage all communities.**

**Please contact Madihha Ahussain at [madihha@muslimadvocates.org](mailto:madihha@muslimadvocates.org) (Muslim Advocates), Lindsay Schubiner at [lindsay@newcomm.org](mailto:lindsay@newcomm.org) (Center for New Community), and Ilhan Cagri at [ilhan@mpac.org](mailto:ilhan@mpac.org) (Muslim Public Affairs Council) with any questions or to discuss this further.**

**Thank you in advance for your partnership and principled leadership.**

**Sincerely,**

**#GetOrganizedBrooklyn**

**18MR.org**

**A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice, Lutheran School of  
Theology at Chicago**

**Advocates for Youth**

**American Friends Service Committee**

**American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)**

**Americans United for Separation of Church and State**

**Amnesty International USA**

**Anti-Defamation League**

**Arab American Institute**  
**Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC)**  
**Auburn Theological Seminary**  
**Bend the Arc Jewish Action**  
**CAIR-MN**  
**California Immigrant Policy Center**  
**Center for New Community**  
**Church World Service**  
**Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)**  
**Colorado Muslim Speakers Bureau**  
**Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)**  
**CREDO**  
**Dominican Sisters of Houston**  
**El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos**  
**Emgage**  
**Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM)**  
**Faith in Public Life**  
**Franciscan Action Network**  
**Friends Committee on National Legislation**  
**GSA Network**  
**Harvard Islamic Society**  
**Hispanic Federation**  
**Hollaback Bosnia and Herzegovina**  
**Hollaback!**  
**Hollaback! Detroit**  
**Hollaback! Seattle**  
**Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters - JPIC - USA**  
**ICNA Council for Social Justice**  
**Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights**  
**Interfaith Worker Justice**  
**International Refugee Assistance Project at the Urban Justice Center**  
**Islamic Networks Group (ING)**  
**Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)**  
**Islamic Speakers Bureau of Arizona**  
**Jewish Community Relations Council**  
**Jewish Council for Public Affairs**  
**Jewish Voice for Peace - Chicago**  
**Jewish Voice for Peace - Denver**  
**Jewish Voice for Peace - Northern New Jersey**

**Jewish Voice for Peace - Triangle, NC**  
**Michigan Muslim Community Council**  
**Muslim Advocates**  
**Muslim Alliance of Indiana**  
**Muslim Community Network**  
**Muslim Justice League**  
**Muslim Public Affairs Council**  
**National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs**  
**National Council of Jewish Women**  
**National Council of La Raza**  
**National Disaster Interfaiths Network**  
**National Hispanic Media Coalition**  
**National Immigration Law Center**  
**National Iranian American Council**  
**National Religious Campaign Against Torture**  
**NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice**  
**OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates**  
**OneAmerica**  
**Physicians for Policy Action**  
**Poligon Education Fund**  
**PRC**  
**Presbyterian Church (USA)**  
**Presbyterian Church (USA) Washington Office of Public Witness**  
**Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**  
**Shoulder to Shoulder**  
**SIREN**  
**South Asian Americans Leading Together**  
**Southern Poverty Law Center**  
**Syracuse Cultural Workers**  
**The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights**  
**The Revolutionary Love Project**  
**The Sikh Coalition**  
**The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society**  
**Together We Rise CT**  
**T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights**  
**Union for Reform Judaism**  
**Unitarian Universalist Association**  
**Unitarian Universalist College of Social Justice**  
**Unitarian Universalist Mass Action Network**

**Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)**  
**United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries**  
**UURISE - Unitarian Universalist Refugee & Immigrant Services & Education**  
**Veterans for American Ideals**  
**We Belong Together**  
**Welcoming Gainesville and Alachua County**  
**Women In Islam Inc**  
**Women's March Michigan**  
**Workers' Center of Central New York**