

**OFFERED BY COUNCILOR TANIA FERNANDES ANDERSON, LUOLJEUNE, MEJIA, ARROYO, BOK, BREADON, COLETTA, FLAHERTY, WORRELL, MURPHY AND FLYNN**



## **CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL**

### **ORDER FOR A HEARING TO DISCUSS HOW THE BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS CAN MORE EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF ITS MUSLIM STUDENTS**

**WHEREAS,** The Boston Public Schools is tasked with educating all of the students in their charge and therefore, must create a safe and secure haven for its pupils as well as offer them a rigorous education; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Followers of the Islamic faith make up the second biggest religious group of students who attend our schools, and they are in need of support and services from culturally competent educators who are aware of how to honor their identities, allowing them to flourish at school; *and*

**WHEREAS,** In an article by Felicia Gans, published in the May 4th, 2021 edition of the Boston Globe, 61 percent of BPS students and students of surrounding suburbs say that they have been bullied in school, and 14 percent of our Muslim youth don't feel comfortable telling their peers at school that they are Muslim; *and*

**WHEREAS,** In the same study referenced in this article, 40 percent said they have heard of a Muslim student being physically harassed at school, and 17 percent of the students surveyed said that they themselves have had their hijab pulled and tugged on; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Students have the right to request reasonable accommodation for religious expression in public schools, such as designated spaces that can be utilized for prayer, as long as said prayers are not disruptive to their peers, but they are often too intimidated to ask, despite public schools being required to provide students an opportunity to practice their religion without favoring one religion over another; *and*

**WHEREAS,** There is currently a dearth of places and times within our schools where Muslim students can take the breaks they need to pray, as practicing Muslims must pray at times that correspond to school hours, amplifying the spiritual necessity of the creation of such spaces that will allow for their spiritual practices; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Religious involvement plays an important role in mental health, especially among marginalized ethnic communities by promoting culture and identity in a largely white-Christian-dominated society; *and*

**WHEREAS,** The generic dietary options that are made available to our BPS students are often not options that a practicing Muslim can partake in. This creates conditions in which Muslim students must abstain from said food options, or bring food from home; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Thirty-three percent of Muslim students in the Boston area report that they have altered their appearance, behavior and name to disguise their Muslim identity in the face of persistent harassment and discrimination; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Practicing Muslims often have uniform needs that may conflict with certain requirements for classes. Muslims often cover their bodies as a part of their faith, and this needs to be allowed and honored in various contexts, such as gym classes; *and*

**WHEREAS,** There are several Muslim holidays throughout the school year that are not recognized as city holidays and hence, the students do not get days off. Religious exemptions for said absences must be instituted with a reasonable amount of time given for students to make up all assignments given during those days, and specific provisions must be made for the fasting that occurs during Ramadan, when followers of the faith do complete fasts of both food and drink for a month; *and*

**WHEREAS,** More attention must be paid to the specific bathroom needs of our Muslim students, including the proper provision of clean water and soap that will allow them to purify themselves in the proper manner after every utilization of bathroom facilities, sufficient privacy needs, and the ability of our pupils to recite duas, among other matters; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Boston Public School policy has as a stated goal of building a safe and supportive environment, and recognizes and respects the diverse population of its pupils in their schools and out in the community; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Schools play an important role in teaching students about race and ethnicity, formally and informally, and a student's own identity is heavily influenced by a school's climate, proving the profound importance of progressive education in the creation of confident and strong willed youth; *and*

**WHEREAS,** A positive school climate is one in which students feel safe, respected, and supported, furthermore, a positive school climate increases student engagement, improves student outcomes, and improves student mental health; *and*

**WHEREAS,** It is the responsibility of our City's school system to educate all of our youth, to keep them safe, to encourage the flowering of their full identities, and to recognize what makes them who they are, including the honoring of their religious practices; ***NOW, THEREFORE BE IT***

**ORDERED:** That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing, with Boston Public School administrators, Chief of Equity and Inclusion, Senior Advisor for Youth and Schools, educators, religious leaders, and other concerned entities present, to discuss how the Boston Public Schools can properly support the needs of its Muslim student population.

**Filed on:** October 19th, 2022