

# Islamophobia in Massachusetts: Rising Concerns and Needed State Initiatives

Since October 2023, Massachusetts has witnessed an alarming rise in Islamophobic incidents, exacerbated by global events and local sentiments. This report aims to provide stakeholders with a clear overview of the current situation, focusing on hate crimes, harassment, and discriminatory practices affecting Muslim residents in the Commonwealth.<sup>1</sup>

## Recent Anti-Muslim Incidents

- A Muslim student was rushed to the emergency room after a classmate poisoned him by adding a toxic substance to his water bottle.
- Another Muslim student was pummeled by a classmate, resulting in a concussion.
- A Muslim customer was chased by an enraged, scissors-wielding employee at a coffee shop after pointing out that he was given the wrong order. A sign on the shop's window said, "Glory to the army of Israel."
- Muslim employees, ranging from service workers to highly specialized physicians, continue to be disciplined or fired in response to their personal social media posts about the crisis in Gaza. Many are the targets of well-coordinated doxxing campaigns, often resulting in death threats.

## Massachusetts Trends

While discrimination against Muslims is a constant in the Commonwealth, it typically increases in response to current events and election cycles. The last major surge took place around the 2020 elections and the federal government's efforts to implement a "Muslim ban." Starting in October 2023, following the onset of the war on Gaza, Muslims in Massachusetts began reporting Islamophobic incidents at an unprecedented rate.

Twice as many people called CAIR-MA for help in 2023 as in 2022, an [all-time high](#). Almost 80% of the calls from October through December 2023 were related to the war in Gaza. For the first six months of 2024, we continued to receive nearly twice as many requests for help as in recent years.

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<sup>1</sup> The experience in Massachusetts is consistent with the national trend, as documented by CAIR's national office: [2024 Civil Rights Report, Fatal: The Resurgence of Anti-Muslim Hate](#).

## Hate Crimes & Harassment<sup>2</sup>

- Reports of hate crimes and harassment increased by 40% in 2023, continuing an alarming upward trend that started in 2022, after several years of decreasing incidents.
- The level of violence has also escalated. Massachusetts Muslims have been physically assaulted, stalked, menaced, threatened, spit upon, and even poisoned. Their property has been vandalized, including the use of feces.
- After the war on Gaza started in October, more victims of hate crimes and harassment called for help than in all of 2022. 2024 is on track to be even worse. We received almost as many calls in the first six months of 2024 as in all of 2023.

## Educational Institutions

- Requests for help with education-related issues, from the elementary school level to colleges and universities, doubled in 2023. Massachusetts Muslims reported discriminatory treatment by teachers and school officials as well as bullying by classmates.
- Two-thirds of those incidents took place after the war on Gaza started.
- It appears that college students who took part in pro-Palestinian protests have been disciplined more harshly than students who took part in other protest movements.
- Requests for help during the first half of 2024 remain at twice the number as in previous years.

## Policy Recommendations

The escalating Islamophobic incidents in Massachusetts demand immediate attention and robust policy responses. Any state initiatives must include ways to safeguard the civil rights of ALL Massachusetts residents, particularly Muslims. By addressing these challenges head-on, the Commonwealth can uphold its commitment to equality and justice for all.

- **Education and Awareness Programs:** Implement comprehensive training for educators on anti-discrimination practices as they are experienced by Muslims.
- **Community Engagement:** Foster dialogue and support networks within communities to promote inclusivity and combat prejudice toward all religions and their practitioners.

*July 23, 2024*

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<sup>2</sup> CAIR-MA does not include statements about the war in Gaza in its definition of a hate crime/harassment. We believe that all Americans, regardless of their views, have the right to speak out about political issues, especially those that are subject to intense international debate. We believe that all Americans have the same right to criticize a foreign government as the hard-fought right to criticize their own.