

February 14, 2025

Dear Sheriff/Superintendent:

As you may know, your Muslim prisoners likely will begin to observe the holy month of Ramadan at sunset on **Friday, Feb. 28** (dependent on the sighting of the crescent moon) and ending at sunset on **Saturday, March 29**, followed by the holiday of Eid al Fitr on **Sunday, March 30**. Please know that we greatly appreciate the efforts taken year-round efforts to ensure the religious rights of Muslim prisoners.

During Ramadan, your Muslim prisoners will abstain from both food and drink from dawn to sunset, unless it would compromise their health to do so. They also will spend a good deal of their free time in prayer. We offer the following information to help with your Ramadan preparations.

Pre-dawn meal (*suhoor*). A common misconception is that fasting begins at sunrise. Muslims actually begin fasting at dawn, which is earlier. As a result, correctional facilities need to make sure that the pre-dawn meal, called *suhoor*, is provided early enough for prisoners to eat their meal before dawn arrives.

The time when dawn begins varies, depending on location. It also changes over the course of Ramadan, as dawn begins at a slightly different time each day. You can calculate the time, based on location, when Muslim prisoners must finish eating *suhoor* using this website: <https://www.islamicfinder.org/ramadan-calendar> ("*sehar*" is an alternate spelling of *suhoor*). Failure to provide this pre-dawn meal early enough may lead to missing meals, which in turn may violate the law. *Thompson v. Holm*, 809 F.3d 376, 380 (7th Cir. 2016).

Post-sunset meal (*iftar*). Correctional facilities should provide the post-sunset meal, called *iftar*, so that it is available as soon as sunset comes, as prisoners will have been without food or liquid for over 12 hours by the end of Ramadan. The website listed above can calculate daily sunsets for you.

Accommodating all Muslim prisoners who request Ramadan meal service. Under the federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, 42 U.S.C. § 2000cc *et seq.*, and the First Amendment, a correctional facility must accommodate every prisoner who asks for Ramadan meal service. Absent a compelling reason, it violates the law to condition a religious diet on anything other than the individual "represent[ing] that he believes that he must consume [the diet] to conform with his religious beliefs." *White v. Linderman*, 11-cv-8152, 2013 WL 4496364, at *6 (D. Ariz. Aug. 22, 2013). While facilities can maintain a sign-up process, those who arrive at prisons and jails after the deadline, and who request Ramadan meal service, still need to be included.

Nutritional guidelines. The meals provided to fasting Muslim inmates must be adequate to meet the recommended daily nutrition that prisons and jails make available to all inmates. *Welch v. Spaulding*, 627 Fed. App'x 479, 484 (6th Cir. 2015). If the pre-dawn and post-sunset meals, combined, do not meet state or federal guidelines, a correctional facility must provide a snack to be eaten between meals.

Inconsistent fasting. Islam does not require fasting if someone is sick, in poor health, or otherwise has a condition that could make it harmful for them to fast. The decision as to whether health issues prevent a prisoner from fasting is a personal one; the correctional facility should rely on the inmate's sincerely held religious beliefs.

We encourage you to consult with your jail or house of correction's Muslim chaplain to ensure that proper procedures are in place. If your prison does not have a Muslim chaplain, we would be happy to refer you to a religious authority for advice.

For more information on the general practices and needs of Muslim prisoners, please see *A Correctional Institution's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices*, which can be found on the website of CAIR's national office at www.cair.com/resources/guides-to-muslim-religious-practices.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (781) 281-9992 or bdougan@cair.com, or our Civil Rights Attorney, Mariam Aydah at (413) 264-6675 or maydah@cair.com.

Sincerely,

Barbara Dougan

Barbara J. Dougan, Esq.
Legal Director