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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

REPRESENTATIVE OF THE 182ND DISTRICT

COMMITTEES

STATE GOVERNMENT
AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS
CONVENER, THE WOMEN OF THE PENNSYLVANIA
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
DEMOCRATIC POLICY
PHILADELPHIA DELEGATION
RULES

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE
LIFE SCIENCES AND BIOTECHNOLOGY
SUBSTANCE ABUSE

June 20, 2008

Stephen A. Glassman, Chair
Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission
301 Chestnut Street, Suite 300
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Dear Mr. Glassman:

This letter is written in regards to a June 18, 2008 incident that occurred on the floor of the House of Representatives when State Representative Daryl Metcalfe said he opposed the House's formal recognition of this weekend's 60th annual convention in Harrisburg of the U.S. chapter of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

This recognition was to be in the form of a two-page resolution, sponsored by Speaker Dennis O'Brien, who noted that the convention's mission was to "increase faith and harmony and introduce various humanitarian, social and religious services."

Why was this simple action, spearheaded by the Speaker, opposed?

"The Muslims do not recognize Jesus Christ as God and I will be voting negative," the gentleman from Butler County shockingly stood to explain on the House floor.

I believe that this statement has the potential to do great harm to the members of the Muslim community who reside in our Commonwealth. This outrageous pronouncement does nothing but contribute to an environment of intolerance, fear, and prejudice that, unfortunately, currently exists.

As you better than anyone know, incidents of hate crimes and discrimination against Muslims have increased significantly in recent years. A great number of Muslims have not been only attacked, but isolated, ostracized and disparaged in ways that should be unacceptable in this country – one founded largely based on a desire to pursue freedom of religion in the face of European persecution.

A long time ago, New England colonies, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland were conceived and established as bastions of religious freedom. The American wilderness was settled in the seventeenth century by men and women who refused to compromise passionately held religious convictions and fled Europe. It was here that they began a "holy experiment" to protect individuals from the type of bigotry and persecution that Rep. Metcalf's comments give rise to.

I have already protested the remarks in question on the House floor and requested to have them stricken from the official record. However, more action is needed.

Therefore, I am respectfully requesting that you convene a forum sponsored by the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission to discuss the issue of inter-group relationships and the challenges that Muslims face in Pennsylvania. Our goals should include the difficult, but necessary, task of developing ways to counter bigotry by promoting a greater understanding of our differences as exposed and highlighted by our similarities.

It is paramount that Members of the General Assembly be strongly encouraged to join with members of the Muslim community and others in order that we may attempt to turn this situation into a teaching moment about tolerance.

With your assistance, we can take a dark and ugly occurrence that occurred on the Floor of our respected House Chambers and use it to promote the tolerance and understanding that our founders intended.

Thank you for your attention to this request. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours,



Babetta Josephs

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cc: The Honorable Edward G. Rendell, Governor
The Honorable Dennis O'Brien, Speaker
The Honorable Jewell Williams
The Honorable Darryl Metcalfe
Ahsanullah Zafar, President - Ahmadiyya Muslim Community
Justin Peyton, PA Civil Rights Director - Council on American-Islamic Relations
Mike Sand, Chairman - Pennsylvania Jewish Coalition
Andy Hoover - American Civil Liberties Union of PA
Interested Parties