ADVOCACY ROAD MAP

A Local Action Toolkit for How You Can Make a Difference
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LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Community Member,

All politics are local. We adhere to that political maxim in all our work. We believe the key to our community’s success is the extent to which we effectively organize, build relationships with public officials, and leverage our influence with policymakers. This Advocacy Roadmap: A Local Action Toolkit for How You Can Make a Difference, seeks to build on the foundation that has already been laid by advocates and community members like you.

This toolkit, paired with our online Advocacy Portal, provides the resources our community members need to advocate for issues that matter most. We provide specific steps advocates can take in their local communities to advance some of our community’s key issues, including: surveillance, bigotry, hate crimes, and free speech.

But we are not in this alone. This toolkit is an invitation to, and acknowledgement of, our allies, who we join to pursue an agenda that addresses the multitude of ways minority communities suffer increased targeting under flawed federal policies and escalating hate incidents. While this toolkit provides a solid starting point, please note it is a working draft which will be updated as we hear from you about your needs. Your feedback and suggestions are welcome.

Leading up to the 2016 election, polling showed an above average voter participation rate for Arab Americans, with 91% of Arab Americans planning to vote on Election Day. In the aftermath of the election, we have seen a surge in engagement and energy and we must continue in the leadup to the midterm elections and beyond. This is how we can do it.

In solidarity,

Maya Berry
Executive Director
Arab American Institute
Before we even discuss the issues, the most powerful thing you - as an advocate - can do is to know who you are representing. Most policymakers are unaware of the size, diversity, and interests of the Arab American community. It is our job to teach them, and to use our collective influence to promote policies together.

Arab Americans are a diverse community of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants, 3.7 million strong, who have come from throughout the Arab world.

Since the first wave of Arab immigrants arrived in the United States in the 1880s, Arab Americans have been active in every aspect of American life. Arab Americans share the same economic and social diversity as all Americans, but we also share treasures brought with us from our native lands—a rich heritage and culture, a strong extended family network, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a drive for excellence.

While Arab Americans live in all fifty states, more than two-thirds of the population live in ten states—California, Michigan, New York, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

A majority of Arab Americans are native-born. Nearly 82% of Arabs in the U.S. are citizens. The majority of Arab Americans have ancestral ties to Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq.

**EDUCATION**

Arab American adults with at least a high school diploma number 89%. 45% of Americans of Arab descent have a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 27% of Americans at large. 18% of Arab Americans have a postgraduate degree, which is nearly twice the American average of 10%.

**OCCUPATION**

Similar to the national average, about 65% of Arab American adults are in the labor force; with 5% unemployed. 73% of working Arab Americans are employed in managerial, professional, technical, sales or administrative fields. 14% of Americans of Arab descent are employed in service jobs, compared to 17% for Americans overall. Most Arab Americans work in the private sector (88%), though 12% are government employees.

**INCOME**

Median income for Arab American households in 2008 was $56,331 compared with $51,369 for all households in the United States. Mean individual income is 27% higher than that national average of $61,921. 13.7% of Arab Americans live below the poverty line, though the figure increases to over 28% for single mothers.
The worsening trend of the U.S. government treating Arab Americans and American Muslims as communities solely defined by national security has continued with the Trump Administration. There are ways the 3.7 million Arab Americans, approximately 35% of whom are Muslim, can strategically fight back on key issues—surveillance, bigotry, hate crimes, democracy and free speech—where national security drivers infringe on our civil rights.

Each of these policy areas have unjustly securitized our communities and infringed on our civil rights. Because national security issues are often discussed out of context and used as a tool of political opportunity, many of these issues provide unique challenges. With these challenges come specific opportunities for advancement and local advocacy.

But this is not just a toolkit for opposition. While there are important moments to vocally and loudly oppose U.S. policies—and we do—we cannot only oppose.

There are around 7 million Americans in full-time federal and state civil service positions. So, even though there may well be government officials in important roles who might seek to implement bigoted agendas, there are literally millions who will not.

Good people in government will continue to stand with and fight for American ideals that protect and value all communities. We must enlist them in our fight. And, much more fundamentally, taxpayers must hold our government accountable. State and local governments provide easy and accessible opportunities for this crucial avenue of engagement.

This road map lays out how local communities can channel their collective passion, education, and skills into a focused plan to impact local laws and national policy.
DEMOCRACY

Protecting our most important right

Voting is often referred to as the most important right in a democracy—the mechanism by which all other rights are secured. Because of the fundamental nature of voting, election-related rights and reforms are pertinent not only when campaigns dominate our political landscape, but year-round, every year. Grassroots actions to protect the right to vote are now more important than ever as the United States faces challenges in redistricting, election transparency, maintaining ballot access, election security, and flaws in the fundamental structures of American democracy. To protect democracy, a broad array of reforms must be considered at the local, state, and federal levels.

First, in some states representatives are de facto imposed through a politically driven gerrymandered process supported by both parties for partisan reasons, instead of allowing voters to choose their representatives. Each individual state decides how to redistrict congressional maps for the election following the release of data from the decennial U.S. Census, which is why an accurate accounting of “the whole number of persons in each State,” as required by the 14th Amendment, is critical to the fair functioning of our electoral democracy. An accurate accounting of all people, not just citizens, must occur at the federal level, and the creation of non-partisan redistricting committees must form at the state level. Such committees are already present in Washington, Idaho, California, Arizona, and Hawai’i. At present, the Supreme Court is also considering two constitutional challenges to political gerrymanders: Gill v. Whitford out of Wisconsin, and Benisek v. Lamone from Maryland.

Next, since the Supreme Court holdings of both Citizens United v. FEC and McCutcheon v. FEC struck down both corporate and aggregate campaign contribution limits, respectively, monied interests and wealthy individuals have held outsized influence over law and policy at all levels of governance. Campaign finance reform must restore the influence of all citizens in the political system, regardless of access to financial resources, to ensure elections are fair and represent the views of all voters equally.

In addition to financial reforms to ensure equal voice in the political process, the act of voting itself should be as easy as possible for those who wish to exercise their civic duty. However, in 2010, a legislative onslaught to suppress voting led to 23 states passing restrictive voting laws. 14 of these state laws were introduced intentionally to affect the 2016 election’s turnout. These voting restrictions go hand-in-hand with the false notion that voter fraud is a major problem in U.S. elections. Crucially, strict voter identification laws have been found to depress voter turnout in many minority groups. Registration reforms must include both automatic and same-day registration, and voting reforms should include both early voting and mail-in voting. Combined, these reforms would lower existing barriers for many Americans to vote, and allow a broader array of voices to participate in our electoral system.

From 2002 to 2005, several states obtained new voting systems, but alarmingly many have not updated their technology since that time. Before the 2016 elections, foreign actors targeted multiple states’ election technologies, with varying degrees of success. Assuring voters that election technology is up-to-date and secure is essential
to maintaining faith in America’s democratic system. Electoral systems must be secure from hacking and computer error. A secure system must include secure voter registration records, paper records of each vote, and post-election audits of the overall election results.

**ACTION 1: STAND FOR NON-PARTISAN REDISTRICTING COMMISSIONS, PUBLICLY-FINANCED CAMPAIGNS, AND FEDERAL ELECTION REFORM**

**Target:** U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, state election officials, state election boards and commissioners, state legislators; and city councils.

**Actions:**

1. Depending on your state, meet with your state legislator, circulate petitions to send to the state board of elections, or support ballot measures to create non-partisan redistricting commissions and support publicly-funded campaigns at the state and local levels.

2. Contact, or meet with, your Representative and Senators to support the following reforms: the Fair Representation Act, which would establish ranked-choice voting for federal elections; the Democracy Restoration Act, which would restore voting rights in federal elections to the formerly incarcerated; and the Voter Empowerment Act, which improves voter access, particularly to those with disabilities.

**ACTION 2: STAND FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN ELECTION SECURITY**

**Target:** U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, state and local election officials, community members, and state election boards and commissioners.

**Actions:**

1. Educate voters, election poll workers, and local and state officials on the dangers of election hacking and the spread of disinformation on social media. Hold workshops to explain how voting systems can be hacked, what can be done to safeguard against this, and what disinformation has popularly been propagated online. Hold discussion panels with local election offices to teach concerned voters how voting systems work.

2. Call Senators’ offices, set up constituent meetings, and write letters to elected officials demanding community oversight in the funds allocation process. Pending its passage, the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 will designate an estimated $380 million to state officials “to enhance election technology and make election security improvements.” Community stakeholders deserve a say in how appropriations will be spent on voting security measures. Legislators need to know constituents care that their votes are valid and being correctly counted.

3. Secure voting measures can vary tremendously. Demand election officials consider reforms such as implementing the use of paper ballots, in-person ballot counting, and rigorous post-election audits.
SURVEILLANCE
Discriminatory scrutiny, mass dragnet

The civil rights and civil liberties of the Arab American community have been acutely impacted by the U.S. government’s national security approach that treats Arabs and Muslims as security threats. Because of this framework, federal and state governments have pursued aggressive national security surveillance programs to stop the threat of U.S.-based recruitment efforts of the self-proclaimed “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL). Though no evidence exists to suggest this is an overriding problem, these government programs, combined with technological advances and the growing mass surveillance dragnet, have significantly infringed upon personal rights in private and public spaces in the name of preventing terrorism.

Many of these national security initiatives, established post-9/11 and in response to the threat of ISIL, come at the expense of the Bill of Rights. Under the current administration, many fear even more egregious offenses to the civil rights and civil liberties of Arab Americans, American Muslims, and other communities targeted for their race, religion, political ideology, and activism. Mass surveillance as permitted under the USA PATRIOT Act, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), and Executive Order 12333 is what enables these so-called “targeted” surveillance programs.

President Trump enacted “Visa Lifecycle Vetting” under ICE, requiring any traveler to the United States to be a “positively contributing member of society,” and be able to “make contributions to the national interest.” Under the program, ICE has the capabilities to develop computer programs to continuously monitor blogs, public hearings, social media websites, and a host of other online sources in order to vet visa applicants based on broad criteria. Under a vague mandate, ICE will be able to exclude or deport whomever it wants. The program calls for immigrants to be continuously surveilled, and not just when applying for a visa.

Worryingly, in late January 2018, a leaked draft report surfaced from the Department of Homeland Security which called on authorities to continuously surveil “persons of interest,” i.e. Sunni Muslims in the United States. An important and strategic part of fighting surveillance programs that single-out specific communities is joining other communities and activists across the political spectrum to reform the basis for the government’s surveillance powers. Surveillance reform requires all concerned citizens to push back against the legal authorities who make these programs possible and engage in unlawful surveillance of any community.

For more information, additional resources, and opportunities for immediate action on surveillance, please visit www.aaiusa.org/surveillance.
ACTION 1: STAND AGAINST THE VISA LIFESTYLE VETTING PROGRAM


Actions:

(1) Using the letter sent by the Congressional Black Caucus as a model, circulate letters among local community groups, demand that Members of Congress author or sign letters opposing the Visa Lifecycle Vetting Program, and directly engage DHS to express the inevitable discriminatory results of such a program.

(2) Major companies like IBM, Deloitte, LexisNexis, and Booz Allen Hamilton have shown interest in the contract to develop software for the Visa Lifecycle Vetting Program. Companies should not help or benefit from engaging in this discriminatory practice. Sign the petition to IBM’s CEO, imploring him not to assist the administration in deporting immigrants, and address letters to these companies, asking them not to participate in this data collecting effort.

(3) Work together with community groups and advocacy organizations to produce calls, letters, and social media campaigns targeting the Department of Homeland Security to express concern with the program.

ACTION 2: STAND FOR INFORMED, RELATIONSHIP-CENTRIC COMMUNITY POLICING THAT RESISTS COUNTERTERRORISM INSPIRED TACTICS

Target: Local police, Joint Terrorism Task Force members, and U.S. Attorneys.

Actions:

(1) Urge local and federal officials to stop treating Arab Americans and American Muslims like suspected terrorists. Call for the end of “Countering Violent Extremism” intervention programs – like “Shared Responsibility Committees” or the Los Angeles Police Department’s RENEW program – that ask our community to spy on one another to try to identify “radicalized” individuals. These programs are based on debunked science and are detrimental to everyone.

(2) Begin conversations which promote the understanding of the broad concerns of the Arab American community. Like all Americans, Arab Americans are concerned about our safety, jobs, healthcare, and education. There are important ways law enforcement can join alongside our efforts in these areas to improve our community and keep everyone safe. The Arab American Institute recommends the implementation of community-led police trainings to expose law enforcement officials to the community in a constructive, controlled environment.

(3) Organize community meetings or town hall events with local law enforcement where the concerns of the community can be shared, and a conversation about keeping the community safe can begin. Demand greater transparency from law enforcement agencies regarding their investigative techniques and data collection.
ACTION 3: STAND AGAINST THE EXPANSION OF GOVERNMENT WATCH LISTING

**Target:** U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, Department of Homeland Security, and the Intelligence Community.

**Actions:**

1. American citizens on the No Fly List or the Selectee List have their civil rights infringed upon without being charged of a crime. American citizens must demand the legal right to challenge their placement on one of these lists without an unreasonable burden. The fact that citizens cannot already do this is an appalling offense to the due process clause of the Constitution. Through federal elected officials and direct correspondence, demand that DHS reform its redress process for the No Fly List.

2. The basis for adding U.S. citizens to a watch list needs to require probable cause. Though the nomination criteria are classified, leaks indicate that a single social media post can be reason enough to be added to one of these lists. Through federal elected officials and direct correspondence, demand more transparency around watch listing procedures.

3. Demand that Congress take up effective oversight of and investigate the vast government watch listing system. Request that Congress require the intelligence community to investigate and report why Dearborn, Michigan – a city of 90,000 people – is the 2nd most watch listed city in the country, only trailing New York City.

4. Be prepared for rapid response campaigns if Congress introduces more bad legislation like “No Fly, No Buy” that validates secretive watch listing.
BIGOTRY

Standing up for a diverse and welcoming country

Since 9/11, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bigotry have remained a consistent phenomenon. The 2016 election cycle brought a fresh wave of bigotry directed toward immigrants and communities of color in the United States that we are still fighting. The Arab American Institute and many of our allies are focused on urgent measures to safeguard historically-disenfranchised communities against the federal government’s aggressive, discriminatory policies that aim to undermine existing protections. The President has furthered a nativist agenda via extremist rhetoric, executive orders, administrative regulations, and legislation.

Many of the concerning immigration proposals and policies are reflective of a fear-mongering and xenophobic approach to policy making disguised in a cloak of “national security interests,” such as the various iterations of the Muslim & Refugee Ban, the proposed wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, the recession of DACA, funding threats against sanctuary cities, and the dramatic increases in ICE raids, citizenship removals, and deportations. When immigration policy is used as a tool to discriminate against immigrants based on their national origin, ethnicity, or religion, it is at odds with American values. The determination of immigration status must follow due process, enforcement of immigration laws must be performed humanely, and our immigration policy must uphold the equal protection and application of laws for all.

There are numerous opportunities for local communities to push back on the xenophobic policies of the Trump Administration. These actions will send a clear message that a compassionate approach to immigration policy is in line with American ideals, and the habitual denigration of immigrants and explicit denial of the United States as a nation of immigrants are not.
ACTION 1: STAND AGAINST THE MUSLIM BAN

**Target:** U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, and community organizations.

**Actions:**
1. **Hold events to encourage cooperation and understanding between mosques/Islamic centers and other prominent community organizations.** Collaborate with Muslim communities to facilitate cultural awareness events as part of an effort to promote greater inclusivity.
2. **Meet with your Members of Congress to inform them of your opposition to the Muslim Ban and the moral imperative to take proactive steps to combat discriminatory immigration policy.** As we await a Supreme Court decision on the Muslim Ban, Congress has the power to nullify Trump’s xenophobic Proclamation with legislation.

ACTION 2: STAND FOR A ROBUST REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM

**Target:** U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, governors, state legislators, mayors, city councils, and refugee resettlement organizations.

**Actions:**
1. **Meet with your Members of Congress to urge them to oppose xenophobic actions** such as the Refugee Ban, and to support greater refugee resettlement efforts to match our historical commitment to those in danger around the world. Encourage local cities to be welcoming cities for resettlement. In the face of unprecedented human-made and natural disasters around the world, the United States should meet a moral obligation of accepting and resettling refugees commensurate with our ability to do so. Despite America’s historical role of a land of opportunity, the Trump Administration pledged to accept no more than 45,000 refugees annually, the lowest number since 1980. Last year the Administration also imposed a Refugee Ban, blocking over 24,000 refugees from entering the country. After the ban lifted, still 40% fewer refugees were accepted than before.
2. **Identify advocacy groups, refugee support organizations, and fellow citizens to help illustrate the positive impacts refugees have had, or could have, on your community.** Consider writing Op-Eds in local publications to garner support for refugees in your area. Call on community members to volunteer and donate to refugee resettlement agencies.
3. **Contact your governor, state legislators, mayor, and city council** to express desire for your state and city to participate in refugee resettlement to welcome refugees. While the federal government controls the overall level of refugees accepted into the United States, each community can play a part in making refugees who are accepted feel welcomed in our country. You can show local officials that your community support refugees by organizing letter writing campaigns, and requesting in-person meetings.
**ACTION 3: STAND FOR FAMILY REUNIFICATION AND DIVERSITY VISAS**

**Target:** U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, and community immigrant support organizations.

**Actions:**
1. **Meet with your members of Congress to oppose Trump’s immigration policies.** In an effort to discourage legal immigration, the President presented a **desired immigration policy** which ends diversity visas and severely limits family reunification.

   (2) **Work with immigrant support organizations to highlight the contributions of those who have come to the U.S. through family reunification and diversity visas.** Show the integral role that open-hearted immigration plays in our country by informing elected officials of community members who have benefitted from welcoming immigration policy. Long-standing visa programs, such as family re-unification and diversity visas, have contributed to the unique creativity, diversity, and stability of America’s immigrants.

**ACTION 4: STAND FOR STATE AND LOCAL SANCTUARY POLICIES TO SEND A CLEAR MESSAGE OF INCLUSIVITY**

**Target:** Governors, state legislators, mayors, city councils, and local police departments.

**Actions:**
1. **The current administration’s frustration with the pushback of local jurisdictions on enforcing their immigration policies has been clear throughout the President’s term.** This became official when the Department of Justice sued California for laws which the President claims prevent federal immigration officials from deporting immigrants. **Meet with your mayor and members of your city council to express desire for your city to become a sanctuary city** – especially if your governor cooperates with federal immigration officials beyond legal necessity. Use the draft city council resolution provided in the resources section.

   (2) **If any local police departments participate in ICE’s 287(g) program,** which deputizes local officials to enforce federal immigration policy, meet with those police agencies to express the illegal racial profiling and civil rights violations that are inherent in an institutionalized search for undocumented immigrants.
HATE CRIMES

Standing against bias

Signs indicate that hate crimes are on the rise in American communities. In recent years, the United States has suffered a spate of incidents garnering national media coverage, including: the 2015 murder of nine African American worshippers at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina; the 2015 murder of three Arab American Muslim students in Chapel Hill, NC; the 2016 murder of Arab American Khalid Jabara on the front porch of his Tulsa, Oklahoma home; and the 2017 murder of two white men on a train in Portland, OR, who had come to the defense of passengers facing harassment at the hands of a white supremacist. The violent march of white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia in August of 2017 was a public display of the growth of hate in America. Indeed, the most recent data indicate an overall increase in hate crimes: a 6.8% increase from 2014 to 2015, and another 5% increase from 2015-2016. In 2016, nearly 60% of hate crimes reported to the FBI were based on ethnicity, and over 20% were based on religious affiliation.

A hate crime is a criminal offense against a person or property that is motivated by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, disability, or other protected characteristic. A hate crime law is a law that imposes a tougher penalty on criminals who target their victims based on the aforementioned biases.

The federal government does not impose mandatory reporting of hate crime incidents, leading to the failure of many jurisdictions to report hate crimes at all. This causes significant and consequential underreporting of incidents. A report from the Department of Justice cited nearly two-thirds of all hate crimes go unreported.

While there are federal hate crime laws, and the Department of Justice has enforcement authority, the laws remain limited and leave significant opportunity for local action. Local hate crime protection is three-fold: (1) individual state legislatures should pass their own hate crime laws that protect the diverse communities in their state; (2) local law enforcement agencies should be better trained to investigate incidents as hate crimes; and (3) state attorneys must prosecute these crimes as a hate crime when appropriate.

While the vast majority of states have some hate crime laws on the books, many are under-inclusive, ignoring the victimization of key communities targeted by hate. Moreover, others do not feature important aspects of model hate crime legislation, such as enhanced penalties, restorative justice, required diversity and hate crimes reporting trainings, and mandatory data reporting from local agencies to both state and federal officials.

For more information, additional resources, and opportunities for immediate action on hate crimes, please visit www.aaiusa.org/hate_crimes.
**ACTION 1: STAND FOR STRONGER HATE CRIME LAWS TO COMBAT INSTANCES OF HATE**

**Target:** State legislators and state human rights commissions.

**Actions:**

1. **Strengthen hate crime laws.** A strong hate crime law includes a penalty enhancement for bias-motivated crimes that target an individual based on their race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability. Many states either do not have hate crime laws, or have a law that does not protect all of these classes.

2. **Mandate that hate crimes are tracked and reported.** By mandating reporting, the federal hate crimes data will be improved, and we can better understand and address the trend of increased hate crimes. If your jurisdiction has not already done so, urge the transition to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) for reporting hate crime data to the federal government.

3. **Require law enforcement officers be trained to better recognize instances of hate and to better interact with victims of hate.** It is critical that police officers know how to identify, respond to, and investigate incidents of hate. Ask to review your county, state, and city police department’s trainings, and offer suggestions for improvement. Require state-wide standardized trainings to avoid differing police department responses.

4. **Organize phone calls, letter campaigns, and in-person meetings with your state legislators to discuss how to improve your state’s hate crime law(s).**

**ACTION 2: ADVOCATE FOR THE IMPROVED ENFORCEMENT OF HATE CRIME LAWS TO SEND A STRONG MESSAGE TO OFFENDERS AND VICTIMS ALIKE**

**Target:** U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, state legislators, federal and state attorneys.

**Actions:**

1. **Share personal accounts of the impact of hate crimes** on front-line impacted communities, like Arab Americans. It is important to give a voice and a face to how hate crimes impact you, your family, your friends, your community, and the nation.

2. **Ask for clarity and conversation about how the legal requirements for charging an act as a hate crime are applied.** Not every crime that appears to constitute a biased motivated crime is charged as a hate crime. It is important to advocate for hate crime charges, and to also listen to how and why charges are brought forward.

3. **Always reiterate the importance of prosecuting a hate crime as such.** Educate the attorneys on the consequences of their inaction, which could generate mistrust within the local community, and make victims more unwilling to report incidents.

4. **Organize meetings between local community leaders and the federal and state attorneys in your jurisdiction.**
ACTION 3: STAND FOR MINIMIZING BIASED AND PREJUDICED PRACTICES

Target: State attorneys and local law enforcement.

Actions:
(1) Require law enforcement officers be trained in cultural awareness. Officers must be able to recognize the cultural differences between minority groups within their communities to better address their specific needs as it pertains to law enforcement, especially among groups most frequently targeted by hate crimes.

(2) Organize meetings with your state attorney and local law enforcement to discuss the importance of culturally-accurate and sensitive training materials. Provide any feedback or accounts of bias to ensure police departments are meeting nationally accepted standards.

See AAI’s Report Hate Project for resources for approaching federal and state attorneys.

TOLEDO, OHIO A community comes together after an Arab American family’s home is vandalized with hate speech.
**FREE SPEECH**

*Chilling attacks on free speech*

In the 1964 case *New York Times v. Sullivan*, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed America’s “profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials.” This legal tradition of protecting political speech necessarily includes foreign governments and public officials, as well, as their policies are central to how our federal government interacts with other nations across the world.

In keeping with this national commitment to free speech, a wide array of American communities have organized around justice for Palestine. However, these movements have historically been met by equally organized attempts to intimidate, harass, and exclude individuals and groups associated with such activities from mainstream political participation. Rooted in what we call the “politics of exclusion,” this “political racism” originally targeted Arab American organizing efforts. Today, the campaign to silence debate about U.S. policy toward the Israeli government, and criticism of Israeli policies, affects a diverse and growing coalition of communities.

College campuses are in many ways the front lines of the free speech challenge. With the rise of student groups that support Palestinian rights---including Students for Justice in Palestine, Jewish Voice for Peace, Black Lives Matter, and more---there is now a sophisticated campaign to define or conflate criticism of Israeli policies as anti-Semitic hate speech. A dark side of this campaign can be seen in the work of the Canary Mission, a website that anonymously publishes profiles of students they claim “promote a hatred of the USA and Israel.” Yet the students who are profiled, including American Jewish students, are known to have advocated for social justice causes and, for some, simply displayed ethnic pride, not anti-Semitic views. These students are often harassed due to their profiles on Canary Mission, and future employment opportunities are threatened.

There is also a campaign to erode the right to boycott---a cherished American tradition---by passing laws in state legislatures, by Executive Order, and in the U.S. Congress. More than two dozen “anti-Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)” bills and resolutions have been introduced at the state, local, and federal level. These laws come in a variety of forms, but they all have the intended effect of punishing businesses and organizations that associate with any part of the BDS movement. However, these “anti-BDS” laws are direct infringements on the constitutional right to boycott, and they limit debate on U.S. policies towards the Israeli government. In the face of a fundamental challenge to free speech and the right to advocate for ones beliefs, we must reject these regressive efforts and work to uphold the American tradition of non-violent social justice movements.
**ACTION 1: STAND FOR FREE SPEECH AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

**Target:** U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, and state legislatures.

**Actions:**
(1) Oppose legislative efforts that would legally redefine “anti-Semitism” to include criticism of Israel as hate speech. American citizens have the right to criticize the policies of foreign governments, and competitive academic settings require robust debate about policy. Defining criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic is extremely problematic. Demand that your local, state, and federal representatives vote against bills which criminalize or penalize legitimate political expression.

(2) Assist schools, universities, educators, and students who are being harassed, intimidated, and having their constitutional rights infringed because of their activism on Palestine, by expressing support for open political expression to the institution’s governing body, such as a Board of Trustees. Schools are having their funding threatened, student groups are being forcibly disbanded, students are being surveilled, and teachers are staking their jobs on their classroom teaching. This environment puts American academia and democracy in jeopardy. These people and organizations need our help.

(3) Push policymakers to listen to, and publically thank those, who speak out about Palestinian stories. Do not protect Israel from criticism, and do not ignore Palestinian voices. Few policymakers are courageous enough to criticize even the most egregious of Israeli policies, or are willing to elevate the suffering or perspective of the Palestinian people.

**ACTION 2: STAND FOR THE RIGHT TO BOYCOTT**

**Target:** U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, and state legislatures.

**Actions:**
(1) Oppose any legislation that restricts protected forms of speech – including the right to boycott. Infringing on Constitutionally-protected activities and political speech is un-democratic. Students, businesses, and organizations should not be targeted or punished for exercising their rights.

(2) Roll back “anti-BDS” laws where they exist. Several states have already passed anti-BDS laws. These laws must be challenged in court or by popular referendum, if applicable.

(3) Organize meetings, letters, emails, calls, social media to draw attention to, and garner support for, the right to boycott.
ADVOCACY PORTAL

All politics are local. We adhere to that political maxim in all our work. The key to our community’s success is the extent to which we effectively organize, register voters, mobilize ahead of election day, build relationships with public officials, and leverage our influence with candidates, incumbents, and policymakers.

While our #YallaVote initiative leads efforts to empower Arab American voters during election seasons, we also provide resources and support for our community members to amplify our collective voice and engage public officials year-round.

There are many ways to effectively build relationships, visibility, and influence our community needs to advance our shared issues.

Below is a list of methods and resources you can use to advocate for the issues that matter most to you.

In all of your advocacy efforts remember the below tips:
- Always be polite, even when oppositional.
- Identify yourself as a constituent and explain your role in the community.
- Cite the specific bill number or policy that you are discussing.
- Don’t rely solely on emotional arguments. Explain how a policy would directly impact you and why the official should support or oppose said policy.
- Try to be as concise as possible.
- Regularly follow up with your public official to maintain and build on the relationship you created.

For more information, you may email GovernmentRelations@aaiusa.org.
Personal Visits
A personal visit is the most effective way of communicating with your public officials. Here are some useful tips:

Schedule a meeting with your public official and three to five local Arab American community leaders. Public officials have busy schedules even while in recess - going in as a small group of prominent local leaders both demonstrates the seriousness of your meeting request and maximizes the members’ time.

Send an e-mail outlining what issues you plan to discuss and who will be attending the meeting, including their role in the community.

You may be scheduled to meet with a staff member. It is important to note that staffers have considerable influence on their bosses, and have a strong grasp on policy issues. Officials rely on their staff for information and briefings. Treat a meeting with a staff member as you would a meeting with your public official.

Have a specific “ask” for the meeting.

After the visit, send an e-mail thanking your official or staff member for their time. Emphasize that you appreciate them taking time to listen to your views and concerns, and that you look forward to their continued cooperation with the Arab American community.

Remain in communication with the office – follow up on the status of your concern, provide the latest news on your policy issue, and request future meetings.

Other effective advocacy techniques include:

Social Media. Social media is one of the most effective ways to get your public official to pay attention to your concern. Facebook and Twitter are two powerful ways to identify yourself as a concerned, engaged, and attentive constituent.

Letters or E-Mails. Letters/e-mails to your public official stating your support or opposition to a piece of legislation or policy is a helpful way for your official to gauge support or opposition in their district.

Media. You can also get the attention of your public officials by writing opinion pieces for your local newspaper. You may view our guide on how to write and publish an op-ed here. Op-eds are great ways to engage other members of your local community and generate discussion around a policy position.

Phone Calls. Personal phone calls are a quick and easy means of communicating with your public official. Offices document calls from constituents to ensure they have an accurate record and measure of concern in their district.
GOVERNMENT 101

The Constitution of the United States divides the federal government into three branches to ensure a central government in which no individual or group gains too much control:

- Legislative – Makes laws (Congress)
- Executive – Carries out laws (President, Vice President, Cabinet)
- Judicial – Evaluates laws (Supreme Court and other courts)

Each branch of government can change acts of the other branches as follows:

- The President can veto laws passed by Congress.
- Congress confirms or rejects the President’s appointments and can remove the President from office in exceptional circumstances.
- The Justices of the Supreme Court, who can overturn unconstitutional laws, are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

The U.S. federal government seeks to act in the best interests of its citizens through this system of checks and balances.

**Legislative Branch**

The legislative Branch enacts legislation, confirms or rejects Presidential appointments, and has the authority to declare war.

This branch includes Congress (the Senate and House of Representatives) and several agencies that provide support services to Congress. American citizens have the right to vote for Senators and Representatives through free, confidential ballots.

**Executive Branch**

The executive branch carries out and enforces laws. It includes the President, Vice President, the Cabinet, executive departments, independent agencies, and other boards, commissions, and committees.

American citizens have the right to vote for the President and Vice President through free, confidential ballots.

**Judicial Branch**

The judicial branch interprets the meaning of laws, applies laws to individual cases, and decides if laws violate the Constitution.

The judicial branch is comprised of the Supreme Court and other federal courts.

Source: www.usa.gov
RE: Supporting Refugee Resettlement in Our Community

[DATE]

Dear [NAME],

As a constituent, I write to ask that you support refugee resettlement in our community. Our community has the capacity to welcome and receive refugees in urgent need of resettlement.

Brutal conflicts have contributed to the world’s worst refugee crisis since World War II, and the world’s worst ongoing humanitarian crisis. Millions have been forced to flee their homes – entire families had their collective ambitions violently uprooted. They are in need of a new and safe home to start anew – we can and should be that home.

Refugees are only admitted into the United States for resettlement after they successfully pass a robust security and health screening process. This process, which can take 18 months or longer to complete, involves the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense, the State Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and others.

Unfortunately, some public officials have resorted to xenophobic tactics to discourage the entrance of refugees or to impose religious tests on refugees seeking to resettle in the United States. These tactics must be condemned.

This is a defining moment in our nation’s history. We can either open the doors to some of the world’s most vulnerable, or we can turn our backs on them. I respectfully ask that you support the resettlement of refugees in our community.

Sincerely,

[INSERT YOUR NAME HERE
ADDRESS
PHONE NUMBER
EMAIL ADDRESS]
RE: DRAFT CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

WHEREAS there are more refugees in the world today than at any time since World War II;

WHEREAS the U.S. pledged to admit 110,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2017;

WHEREAS refugees in need of resettlement are identified based on their vulnerabilities and risk of further exposure to violence and exploitation;

WHEREAS hundreds of thousands of refugees are making life and death decisions to flee their homes and neighboring countries because they are unable to access shelter, health care, education, or protection;

WHEREAS all refugees resettled by the United States undergo an extensive and rigorous security screening process including biometric analysis;

WHEREAS [RESETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE COMMUNITY], the organizations responsible for resettling refugees in this community, as well as numerous other community organizations and religious institutions have declared their support for resettling refugees in [CITY];

WHEREAS [RESETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS] have resettled more than [NUMBER] refugees in [CITY] since 2011 from more than [NUMBER} countries including [LIST COUNTRIES];

Resolved, [NAME] City Council declares its support for the resettlement of refugees in [CITY] and calls upon other [STATE] communities to join them in supporting a stronger national effort to resettle refugees.
WHEREAS, immigrants make significant contributions to every facet of the City of [CITY NAME]’s economic, educational and cultural life; and

WHEREAS, City government has a responsibility to both maintain public safety and ensure that residents feel secure, respected and able to interact with public safety officials without fear; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) has discontinued its “Secure Communities” program. Secure Communities had shifted much of the burden of federal civil immigration enforcement onto local law enforcement; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Homeland Security and ICE have instituted the new Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) to replace Secure Communities; and

WHEREAS, it is incumbent upon the Federal government and its agencies to both listen to individuals concerned with this new program, and ensure that community members are both informed and invested in the program’s success; and

WHEREAS, unless and until this happens, the City of [CITY NAME] should not comply with detainer requests unless they are supported by a judicial warrant and they pertain to an individual being released after conviction for a first or second-degree felony involving violence;

Now, THEREFORE, I, [MAYOR’S NAME], Mayor of the City of [CITY NAME], by the powers vested in me by the [LEGAL SOURCE], do hereby order as follows:

SECTION 1. No person in the custody of the City who otherwise would be released from custody shall be detained pursuant to an ICE civil immigration detainer request pursuant to 8 C.F.R. Section 287.7, nor shall notice of his or her pending release be provided, unless such person is being released after conviction for a first or second degree felony involving violence and the detainer is supported by a judicial warrant.

SECTION 2. The Police Commissioner, the Prisons Commissioner and all other relevant officials of the City are hereby required to take appropriate action to implement this order.

SECTION 3. This Order shall take effect immediately.
SAMPLE NO BIGOTRY CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION
*Modeled after proposed Philadelphia City Council Resolution*

Upholding the [City of ______’s] support for and protection of minority communities, immigrant communities, refugees, condemning violence and hate speech targeted towards these communities, affirming the religious pluralism of the United States, denouncing bigotry, upholding civil discourse, and urging [City] residents to stand in solidarity with our minority, immigrant, and refugee communities - for peace and justice.

**WHEREAS**, Our nation’s founding documents emphasize the freedom of religion and establish a society that embraces religious pluralism; [Our city] has the responsibility to uphold those beliefs as a model for the entire nation; and

**WHEREAS**, Despite manifold contributions, Arab Americans, American Muslims, immigrant communities, and refugees have long faced unjust exclusion and suspicion, and following 9/11 have been subjected to a severe backlash in the form of hate crimes and discrimination toward Arab Americans and American Muslims and those perceived to be either; and

**WHEREAS**, Government-sanctioned surveillance practices by law enforcement have frequently targeted Arabs, Muslims, and those perceived to be either in places of worship, neighborhoods, restaurants, and even schools, despite this repeatedly having been found by courts to be discriminatory and abusive; and

**WHEREAS**, We are saddened and outraged at the recent escalation of hateful rhetoric against these communities and all people of color; we are particularly concerned to see a number of political figures and elected government officials leading this escalation and using it in order to gain power, including by proposing a registry for Muslim immigrants, a ban on immigration from Arab and Muslim-majority countries, a halt to our nation’s refugee resettlement program, and we condemn these actions; and

**WHEREAS**, The [City _____] finds bigoted rhetoric and hate-driven violence to be against American principles of religious freedom, inclusion, and fairness and contrary to the vision we hold as a nation that welcomes all people; and

**WHEREAS**, The [City_____’s] [legal precedent] clearly establishes wide-ranging legal protections against discrimination based on race, national origin, religion, as well as a host of other classifications in order to ensure the equal treatment of all residents, workers, visitors; and Americans; and

**WHEREAS**, [The City _____] recognizes that hate crimes and acts of intimidation have also been directed towards Jewish people, LGBT people, African-American people, immigrants, women, and disabled people and are occurring at higher rates following the recent election, making it all the more crucial that we stand united in denunciation of hate and discrimination; and
WHEREAS We, as elected representatives of the people, have a special responsibility not to stay silent in the face of hate, discrimination, and violence against any of our constituents or countrymen; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE CITY COUNCIL OF [CITY], Hereby:

1) Condemns violence and hate speech, affirms the religious pluralism of the United States, and expresses solidarity with all those targeted for their ethnicity, race or religion;

2) Categorically rejects political tactics that use fear to manipulate voters or to gain power or influence;

3) Commits to pursuing a policy agenda that affirms civil and human rights, and ensures that those targeted on the basis of race, religion or immigration status can turn to government without fear of recrimination; and

4) Reaffirms the value of a pluralistic society, the beauty of a culture composed of multiple cultures, and the inalienable right of every person to live and practice their faith without fear.
A COMMITMENT TO COMBAT BIGOTRY

Whereas bigotry in all its forms is contrary to the inclusive, diverse, prosperous civil society Americans expect and deserve;

Whereas hate-filled rhetoric stirs fear and creates division;

Whereas instances of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bigotry have sometimes gone unchallenged in public and political discourse;

Whereas history has shown that sometimes hateful or ignorant rhetoric intensifies in frequency and virulence during election cycles;

I commit to uphold civil discourse and not engage in bigotry, whether it be in speech or actions, and to speak out against those who do.

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Printed Name ___________________________ District ___________________________