



Participating Organizations

Alexandria for Palestine
 Alliance of Baptists—Justice for Palestine and Israel
 American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
 American Muslims for Palestine
 Appalachian Peace Education Center
 Arab American Association of Central Virginia
 Central Atlantic Conference (UCC) Palestine/Israel Network
 Defenders for Freedom, Justice, and Equality
 Episcopal Peace Fellowship—National Capital Regional Chapter
 Hampton Roads For Palestine Here4TheKids
 Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church—USA
 Jewish Voice for Peace
 Muslims for Just Futures
 National Arab American Women’s Association
 New Dominion PAC
 Northern Virginians for Peace & Justice
 Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace
 Plowshares Peace & Justice Center
 Richmonders for Peace in Palestine
 Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East—Northern Virginia Chapter
 United Methodists for Kairos Response
 US Campaign for Palestinian Rights
 Washington Interfaith Alliance for Middle East Peace

VCHR Calls on FCPS to Defend Student Rights and Refute False Allegations Made by the Congressional Education Committee

The VCHR strongly condemns the racist, anti-Palestinian demands issued against Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) by the Congressional “Committee on Education and Workforce,” led by Republican Representative Tim Walberg [a]. The Committee’s letter to FCPS dated 11/24/2025 is a thinly veiled attempt to stoke anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab, and anti-Muslim racism and suppress anyone who criticizes Israeli policies. **We urge FCPS to resist the Congressional Committee’s efforts to suppress learning and expression, which are the core functions of education.**

FCPS administrators have already shut down constitutionally protected speech of students on multiple occasions over the past few years, including:

- 1) Censoring free speech of students calling for an end to the genocide and other human rights violations during student-organized humanitarian walkouts in solidarity with Palestine and Lebanon. These include labeling certain phrases and actions as “hateful,” including banning calls for freedom such as “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” and displays of maps that acknowledge Palestine.
- 2) Maligning students with “antisemitism” and dangerously accusing them of using “antisemitic language” on several occasions during calls for freedom from oppression. This conflation with “antisemitism” shamelessly equates calls to end genocide with antisemitism, and harms students from different backgrounds.
- 3) Creating an environment where Muslim, Palestinian, and Arab students, and students who express opposition to genocide are subject to disproportionate surveillance, punishment, or institutional suspicion.

Students, families, and teachers who speak critically about Israel's genocide in Gaza are being smeared as antisemitic. This constitutes serious equity and safety concerns, and an unacceptable violation of the freedom of speech of our children and our community. This is happening despite worldwide outrage at the human, economic, cultural, and natural devastation Israel continues to wreak on Gaza with US financial and political support. The International Court of Justice (ICJ), the United Nations, and all the leading international human rights organizations have confirmed that Israel has committed genocide in Gaza [b], along with other war crimes and crimes against humanity [c], such as torture and rape of detainees (including children[d]), and the continuing illegal military occupation and apartheid in the rest of Palestine.

In light of these indictments, Israel and its allies are attempting to silence and curtail free speech to prevent growing public criticism of Israel’s horrific human rights abuses. As part of this effort to suppress criticism of Israeli policies, the Israeli lobby is now attempting to suppress the free speech and academic freedom of FCPS students and teachers. In response, FCPS should live up to its principles and vociferously protect and defend our students, families, and educators against Israel advocacy organizations and this Congressional committee’s unconstitutional assault on our community.

We note that the Congressional Committee, in its letter, has adopted Israel's twisted supremacist dictate that anyone who criticizes its policies is "antisemitic," a stance that would shield Israel from accountability for war crimes but is clearly erroneous and unconstitutional [e]. Furthermore, the cited examples of "antisemitism" include acts of diversity and inclusiveness which FCPS should strive to promote and defend [f], including wearing traditional clothing (such as Palestinian keffiyehs) or sharing historic and geographic information (such as the history and maps of Palestine). It is this type of racism that has led to the genocide in Gaza and other grotesque Israeli human rights abuses against Palestinians. The Committee's investigation into FCPS is an attempt to both further suppress students, who are already facing discrimination from FCPS, and to whitewash Israeli crimes and instigate this type of hateful intolerance in the US, including here in Fairfax County, Virginia.

The Committee's letter claims concern about compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but the Committee's demands have nothing to do with actual antisemitism or protecting civil rights. On the contrary, the Committee is attempting to censor US free speech, and in this case, further suppress FCPS students and educators who oppose the Israeli genocide in Gaza or seek to educate themselves and their community about the long history of Israeli oppression of Palestinians. Israeli propaganda, reflected in the subject Congressional letter, seeks to protect Israel's genocide against Palestinians by censoring any recognition of or protest against these Israeli atrocities (such as humanitarian student walkouts) and censoring any mention of Palestine or Palestinians (such as prohibiting the display of maps of Palestine or traditional Palestinian attire).

Based on published reports, we are disappointed to learn that FCPS has already complied with the Congressional Committee's unreasonable and intrusive demands [g]. This is extremely concerning. As constituents of FCPS, we expect the following:

- 1) Release of a public statement by FCPS that corrects the false allegations made against FCPS students and the school district in Walberg's letter. FCPS should protect its students and families, not "throw them under the bus."
- 2) A public commitment and decisive action from FCPS to stop censoring or punishing free speech, and to combat all forms of racism and discrimination against their students, regardless of their background. This includes students who identify as Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, Jewish, African, Asian, Hindu, or Hispanic. In fact, all types of racism and discrimination based on ethnicity, moral or political beliefs, should be tracked together without differentiating or privileging any of these groups above any others.

We urge FCPS to stand firm in the face of Congressional meddling and insist on allowing and fostering an educational environment where ideas are evaluated and judged on their own merit, and not through an ideological prism or based on the race, religion, ethnicity, or political backgrounds of those who voice those ideas. A truly diverse and inclusive educational environment should protect all students equally- including Palestinian students, students who oppose genocide and support Palestinian rights, and students who want to learn freely about Palestinian experiences. Accordingly, we urge FCPS to protect and defend their students and teachers who are concerned about or oppose Israeli human rights abuses, and protect and defend our Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students, families, educators, and neighbors, just as much as we protect and defend anyone else.

Footnotes:

[a] https://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/fairfax_county_letter_11.21.2025.pdf

[b] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds>

[c] <https://www.icc-cpi.int/defendant/netanyahu>

[d] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/israels-escalating-use-torture-against-palestinians-custody-preventable>

[e] <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-condemns-house-passage-of-dangerous-bill-that-would-chill-free-speech>

[f] <https://www.fcps.edu/equity> and <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.fcps.edu/about-fcps/leadership/district-performance-transparency/diversity-equity-inclusion/social-and-0&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1776444328557303&usg=AOvVaw1C1mFutDNcEGNaPmydZ0u7>

[g] <https://readlion.com/virginia-district-responds-to-federal-antisemitism-investigation-alleging-failure-to-uphold-title-vi-obligations/>