

**STATE OF ILLINOIS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

MUSLIM AMERICAN ADVISORY COUNCIL



THIRD SEMIANNUAL REPORT

JUNE 30, 2014

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Letter



**Illinois Muslim
ACTION! Day Breakfast
Springfield, IL**



**State Employment
Recruitment Workshop
Villa Park, IL**

Dear Governor Quinn,

It gives us great pleasure to submit the third semiannual report of your Muslim American Advisory Council (“MAAC” or the “Council”).

No Governor has done more for the Illinois Muslim American community. You have named Muslim Americans to state jobs and commissions, and issued a cultural sensitivity guide so that all state employees may better understand and respect our faith and traditions. You truly believe that ethnic and religious diversity makes our State and its people better. And for that, we are grateful.

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights Act, let’s not forget about the struggle for social justice that strengthened our common bonds as human beings. It is in that spirit that MAAC calls for a coordinated effort to help the most vulnerable juveniles in our State and a policy that shows compassion to the elderly in our prisons.

Recognizing the key role that education and economic opportunity play in the reduction of social disparities, MAAC also recommends an inclusive outreach strategy to education funding on the home front and steps to open Illinois’ workforce and businesses to new markets abroad.

On behalf of Illinois’ Muslims, thank you, Governor Quinn, for considering our latest recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,

MAAC Members

Recommendations

Public Health and Safety

- ❖ **Play a Lead Role in Establishing a “Juvenile Justice Council” in Cook County.** No one can argue with the fact that Cook County has the highest number of violent crimes in the State and one of the highest number of violent crimes in the nation. Yet it has not established a county juvenile justice council as prescribed by State law (705 ILCS 405/6-12). The Muslim American community urges Governor Quinn to rally support among elected officials in Cook County to establish a regional juvenile justice council, building on his commendable efforts to ensure that juveniles are given a clean slate and have the opportunity to reach their full potential (Public Act 98-0637).

Such a council would utilize existing community resources to assist juveniles who are (i) involved in crime, (ii) truant or (iii) suspended or expelled from school by collaborating with faith- and community-based organizations, law enforcement officials, mental health professionals, educators and businesses to collectively address juvenile justice disparities and disproportionate minority contact and to prevent juvenile delinquency and crime. Additionally, it would (i) develop a county-wide juvenile justice plan, (ii) coordinate efforts among faith- and community-based organizations and volunteer groups to provide supportive services to juvenile justice detention centers and (iii) develop and distribute a resource guide to minors in need of intervention and psychosocial and educational support, among other things.

- ❖ **Implement a Compassionate Release Program for Illinois’ Elderly Prisoners.** Although the overcrowding of prisons in the U.S. is not news, it requires immediate action. Operating a prison system that is over 145 percent of its official inmate capacity, Illinois should follow the example of the federal government by implementing a compassionate release program whereby inmates who are 70 years of age or older and have served 30 years or more of their sentence are granted commutation subject to reasonable parole conditions.

Elderly prisoners comprise less than 1 percent of the total prison population – 271, as of May 31, 2014, to be exact – but the cost of incarcerating elderly prisoners is 3 to 5 times more than the cost of incarcerating general population prisoners; not to mention expensive geriatric medical bills. Moreover, elderly inmates, including those who have been convicted of violent crimes, have extremely low recidivism rates. They are either too ill or no longer have the physical and mental capacity to commit a crime. The elderly – sin or no sin – do not pose a threat to public safety. As these human beings near the end of life, Illinois’ Muslim community asks Governor Quinn to show them mercy and forgiveness by exercising the executive power bestowed unto him by Section 12 of Article V of the Illinois Constitution to develop and implement a compassionate release program consistent with the federal government’s efforts to reduce the number of incarcerated Americans.

Recommendations

Economic Development

- ❖ **Open a Foreign Trade Office in Dubai to serve Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and other Mideast markets.** The Gulf Cooperation Council (“GCC”) is one of the fastest-growing economic unions in the world and is steadily interested in U.S. markets; therefore Dubai, its economic and cultural capital, is befitting of a direct trade connection with Illinois. According to the International Monetary Fund, the combined 2014 Gross Domestic Product of the GCC countries totals \$1.69 trillion, making the region a significant player on the world stage and a larger economy than two of Illinois’ top trade partners: Mexico (\$1.28 trillion) and Australia (\$1.43 trillion). Due to its growth, the GCC region is becoming an important export market for Illinois businesses, as its three largest economies – Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar – have seen an average increase in exports from Illinois of 74 percent since 2009 (Illinois exports overall have increased by only 58 percent over the same period). Exports to the United Arab Emirates alone are estimated to have contributed, both directly and indirectly, to the employment of 4,841 Illinoisans in 2013. The GCC region has also developed an interest in the Chicago metropolitan area, most notably through increased foreign direct investment in commercial real estate (Qatar represented the fifth largest foreign investor in Chicago’s real estate market since 2012), and the recent establishment of daily non-stop flights between Chicago and the GCC region through Qatar Airways and Emirates. Because of the growing importance of the GCC region internationally, its increasing interest in Illinois, and the significant economic opportunities it presents to Illinois’ workforce and business community, MAAC urges Governor Quinn and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity’s Office of Trade and Investment to open a Foreign Trade Office in Dubai to further facilitate and increase trade and investment between the GCC region and Illinois.

Education

- ❖ **Develop an Inclusive Outreach Strategy for the Birth to Five Initiative.** The Muslim American community commends the measures taken by Governor Quinn to increase education and classroom funding (Public Act 98-0645) and fully supports his Birth to Five Initiative, a \$1.5 billion investment to expand access to (i) universal prenatal care, (ii) early care and learning opportunities and (iii) strong parent support. To ensure that all Illinois families benefit from the Birth to Five Initiative, the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development ought to develop an inclusive outreach plan that (i) provides transportation stipends to at-risk, low-income communities, (ii) translates information on the Birth to Five Initiative into other languages, including but not limited to Arabic, to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers in hard-to-reach immigrant communities and (iii) connects faith-based private schools that offer early childhood programs to ExceleRate Illinois, a quality rating and improvement system.

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