



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

October 7, 2019

Congressman Lee Zeldin
2441 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Congressman Scott Perry
1207 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Zeldin and Representative Perry:

We are responding to your letter dated September 12, 2019, requesting an update on the findings of an investigation conducted by the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations (PCHR) into the Umma Day incident at the Al-Hidaya Masjid in Philadelphia (Masjid) on April 17, 2019.

The PCHR is the City's civil rights enforcement agency. Under Philadelphia's Home Rule Charter, the PCHR is charged with enforcing the anti-discrimination laws, promoting equal rights and opportunities, and advancing community relations among the diverse populations in the city. We do this work through two divisions: Our Compliance Unit enforces the civil rights laws by conducting detailed investigations into alleged discriminatory conduct. Our Community Relations Division investigates cases of community conflict and potential discriminatory practices by interviewing people and ascertaining facts in order to develop an appropriate community-based response. We resolve conflicts, and raise awareness through education, with the goal of bringing Philadelphia's diverse communities closer together.

With respect to hate and bias incidents, we concentrate our efforts on assessing the impact of an incident on the affected individuals and communities while working in tandem with law enforcement who investigates any potential criminal aspects of the situation. We work with partners representing all communities to ensure that incidents like this one do not happen again. *The City of Philadelphia condemns and works to eradicate bigotry in all its forms.*

The following is an outline of our investigation into the "Umma Day" incident:

- The PCHR was made aware of the incident during the week of April 29, 2019. Local and federal law enforcement were also aware of the incident. We immediately reached out to the Masjid, the

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national organization of the Muslim American Society (MAS National), and to other partners in the Muslim community to determine the accuracy of the story as well as to ascertain the structure and leadership of the Masjid. It was determined that the translations of the Umma Day event were indeed accurate. The PCHR also learned from MAS National that the Leaders Academy, the organization that taught the class and created the video at the Masjid, was not affiliated with MAS Philadelphia.


- The Muslim American Society (MAS National) issued a public statement on May 4, 2019 condemning the acts. That statement is available on the [MAS Facebook page](#). Importantly, the statement reports that the person in charge of the Umma Day program was dismissed. The Leaders Academy had been using the Masjid as a community space for the Umma Day event.
- On May 13, 2019, the PCHR met in-person at the Masjid building with leadership of the Masjid, MAS Philadelphia, and the Leaders Academy. The meeting included local leaders of the Muslim community, the interfaith community, and leadership of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-Philadelphia), who had been working closely with the Masjid. During the meeting, we learned that the Masjid enlisted Jacob Bender, CAIR-Philadelphia's Executive Director, to conduct anti-bias workshops on Judaism and anti-Semitism for its entire staff, including the aides and administrative personnel. Jacob Bender is a member of the American Jewish community and a former teacher of Jewish history at many synagogues. The Masjid also already was in the planning stages of interfaith activities designed to foster inter-group understanding. The PCHR discussed, among other topics, instituting protocols to avoid similar incidents in the future.
- On May 15, 2019, MAS Philadelphia and the Leaders Academy issued a public statement condemning the event. Their statement is attached to this letter. In addition, the Philadelphia Inquirer published an article on the incident and the statement. A link to the story can be found on the [Philadelphia Inquirer website](#).
- On June 13, 2019, the Masjid held an interfaith Eid Holiday event, which was attended by the PCHR and local faith leaders of Jewish, Christian, and other faiths. During this Eid Holiday event, the Masjid publicly condemned and apologized for the performances at the Umma Day event.

Thank you for your inquiry. Please let us know if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,



Rue Landau
Executive Director



Sally Baraka
Commission Chair