

April 6, 2011

Honorable Gregory R. Ball  
Chair, State Senate Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs  
New York State Senate  
Legislative Office Building  
Room 817  
Albany, NY 12247

**Re: April 8<sup>th</sup> hearing on “Reviewing our Preparedness: An Examination of New York’s Public Protection Ten Years After September 11”**

Dear Senator Ball:

We write on behalf of New York Neighbors for American Values, a coalition of more than 100 good government, religious, service, advocacy, neighborhood, labor and professional organizations and individuals, to express serious concerns about your forthcoming April 8<sup>th</sup> homeland security committee hearing. While we support the committee’s focus on New York’s preparedness for a terrorist attack, we are concerned, based on the topics and lopsided witness list that you have made public, that the hearing is set up as a forum to attack and demonize Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian individuals and those perceived to be. Safety and security are critically important to all of us, but when public officials like yourself use your bully pulpit to fuel unfounded suspicions, it encourages harassment, bias and even violence, not sound public policy. Indeed, fostering division and distrust among New Yorkers is more likely to undermine rather than strengthen Empire State security.

According to a memo circulated by your office and attached to this letter, on April 8<sup>th</sup>, the State Senate Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs will hold a hearing on “Reviewing our Preparedness: An Examination of New York’s Public Protection Ten Years After September 11.” Topics to be discussed at the hearing will include the NYPD’s preparedness for another terrorist attack, radio interoperability in the MTA, and threats posed by the nuclear power plant at the Indian Point Energy Center. In addition, the hearing topics will include, and testimony will be delivered on, “the culture of jihad and Shariah law,” and driver’s licenses for undocumented immigrants.

We urge the committee to focus on genuine security issues which are of concern to all New Yorkers such as the Indian Point Energy Center, particularly given the recent tragic events surrounding the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station in Japan. We also welcome the committee’s interest in the ongoing concerns about the problem of radio communications by the New York City Police Department and the Fire Department during emergency situations.

However, we strongly object to the use of these hearings to fan the fires of prejudice rather than to shed real light on topics of great concern. Isolating the Muslim community to question its loyalty to the United States, and conflating religious practices with preparations for terrorism, are unproductive

and counter to fundamental American values. Such an agenda is discriminatory, misguided, and undermines First Amendment freedoms. Moreover, for the committee to add the unrelated topic of undocumented immigrants' access to driver's licenses, which are unavailable in New York, seems to be driven not by any genuine security consideration but by a desire to further inflame public opinion.

This point is exemplified by the hearing schedule released by your office. Security at the Indian Point nuclear facility, a serious and timely subject for consideration, will be discussed for 15 minutes. Shariah law, on the other hand, will be discussed for 30 minutes. Friday's hearing should focus on ensuring that New York is prepared for another terrorist attack, for adequate communications in an emergency, and on other genuine security concerns. It should not focus on isolating and condemning Muslim and immigrant New Yorkers. Government oversight resources are limited and must be directed efficiently and effectively.

We hope that you will take our concerns into serious consideration and change the agenda. As residents of New York City, we have a very personal interest in effective emergency preparedness as the anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy approaches. The more than 100 organizations involved in the New York Neighbors for American Values coalition represent a very broad swath of our city's diverse population. We work to promote and defend the constitutional rights of religious freedom, diversity and equality and to counteract anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic rhetoric and actions in New York City. We came together to respond to the manufactured controversy surrounding the building of an Islamic Community Center in lower Manhattan and continue to work together to diffuse the prejudice and confusion that has led many individuals, even those that profess goodwill towards Muslim Americans, to believe that there is some basis to treat the Muslim community differently than others.

Should you have any questions, please contact the coordinator of New York Neighbors for American Values, Natalie Chap at 212-691-6421 or [nchap@commoncause.org](mailto:nchap@commoncause.org).

Sincerely,  
New York Neighbors for American Values  
Steering Committee

Michael Ellick, Judson Memorial Church  
Hesham El-Meligy  
Michael Feinberg, Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition  
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Talat Hamdani, 9/11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows  
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