To: The Toronto Police Service Board

From: The Canadian Arab Federation

The Canadian Arab Federation (CAF) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the development of a new public order policy for the Toronto Police Service (TPS). This policy is of critical importance to us given the recent experiences of several members of our community and other pro-Palestinian supporters during peaceful demonstrations.

We are deeply concerned about the prevailing narrative that has been propagated by politicians, media outlets, and certain representatives of the police, which unjustly labels peaceful pro-Palestinian demonstrators as "terrorists," "dangerous," and "disturbing the peace." This harmful rhetoric not only mischaracterizes these demonstrations but also fuels anti-Arab, Islamophobia, and anti-Palestinian sentiments that are, unfortunately already deeply rooted in our society.

It is the responsibility of the Police Service Board to ensure that the TPS upholds the democratic rights of all citizens to demonstrate freely and peacefully, without fear of harassment or undue suppression . Unfortunately, recent events have demonstrated a clear bias against pro-Palestinian demonstrators, evidenced by arbitrary arrests and unjustified persecution. Such actions have severely undermined the confidence and trust of Arab and Muslim communities, as well as other pro-Palestinian supporters, in the fairness and impartiality of the TPS. I am sure the TPS leadership recalls our visit to the HQ and our offer for cooperation and friendship that remain unrequited.

We take this opportunity to ffer a few measures that would help restore this trust and to uphold the principles of democracy and justice We feel strongly that it is imperative that the Board addresses the existing biases head-on. We tender below a few recommendations about measures to be included in the new public order policy:

1. Explicit Commitment to Anti-Racism and Non-Discrimination: The policy should include clear language that condemns and prohibits any form of racism, Islamophobia, and discrimination against Arab, Muslim, and pro-Palestinian communities. This commitment must be reflected in all aspects of policing, particularly in the context of protests and demonstrations.

2. Accountability Mechanisms: There must be robust mechanisms for holding officers accountable when there is evidence of biased or discriminatory behaviour. This includes thorough investigations of complaints related to police conduct during demonstrations and other events, with transparent reporting and consequences for misconduct.

3. Training and Education: Police officers should receive mandatory training on cultural competence, anti-racism, and the importance of protecting the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. This training should emphasize the harm caused by racial and religious profiling and the need for impartiality in policing.

4. Community Engagement and Dialogue: The Board could and should establish a continuous and open dialogue with Arab, Muslim, and other marginalized communities. This includes regular consultations and the formation of advisory groups that reflect the diversity of Toronto’s population. Such initiatives will help bridge the gap between the TPS and these communities, fostering mutual understanding and respect.

5. Independent Oversight: The policy should include provisions for independent oversight of police actions during protests and demonstrations. This could involve the participation of civilian observers and human rights’ organizations to ensure that the rights of demonstrators are respected and protected.

The Canadian Arab Federation urges the Toronto Police Service Board to consider these recommendations seriously as it formulates its public order policy. By doing so, the Board can take meaningful steps towards ensuring that the Toronto Police Service operates in a manner that respects the rights and dignity of all citizens, regardless of their race, religion, or political beliefs.

We look forward to the opportunity to engage further with the Board on this matter and offer to participate in any additional consultations or discussions that may arise during the development of this important policy.

Sincerely,

Dr. Atif Kubursi, Board Chair
Canadian Arab Federation