

Speaker

Clean Verbatim Transcript

Seemab
Hussaini:

Hey greetings, everybody. Yes, my name is Seemab Hussaini, and I'm with the Council on American-Islamic Relations as Vice Chair and Co-founder. Pronouns he/him/his.

And, as far as an organization, you know, CAIR Oregon has... we had joined pretty much the forefront of police accountability work with hugely invested, talented organizations and individuals, such as Pacific Northwest Family Circle. And, since we started three years ago, our start was during the rise of hate crimes against Muslim communities, which is a subject which we set ourselves with.

And, but it's not just that. It's also reflective of the communities that are impacted by the same perpetrators of hate, those same communities that were impacted that we've worked collaboratively with include, but aren't limited to, Black, Brown, Indigenous, Jewish and Faith communities, LGBTQIA and differently-abled people.

So, our first and formal introduction to this whole thing was during the MAX train stabbings. And, at that very point, we discovered how racial bias and even what could be seen as racial animus existed within enforcement, particularly law enforcement such as Portland Police Bureau and how it played into the deaths of two heroes and almost mortally wounding a third.

The target being two young Black girls, one with a hijab. The full story was immediate to us. Portland Police Bureau was intentionally ignoring... the night before when the Portland Police Bureau was... when they

questioned a victim as a suspect the night before the MAX train stabbings. And, they would let this person walk away that night who would wind up turning out to be the murderer of the MAX train... of the victims of MAX train stabbings the next day.

This was an initial insight, as far as being able us to really just kind of get a crash course as to how this injustice is applied from street level and how it works its way up into this particular justice system.

Shortly after all this, we had a fortunate tour given to us of the entire justice system and how it worked through the entire Multnomah County district courts, all the way across the street to the Federal Building, by a public defender named Chris O'Connor, and hate to kind of put him on blast there, but it was really fortunate to be able to walk through the entire justice system and see how these levels of courts and everything worked.

What they call, like, the \$5,000 benches where when you see four or five cops sitting there. They're gather... It's a total of that much overtime that they're likely going to take for that day.

And that essentially was a very, very big eye-opener for us within the first month, I would say even first two weeks, of getting active as an organization back in 2017.

I can go a little bit more if this is the five minutes we're going to work in.

Maria Cahill: Yeah, definitely.

Seemab: Yes. So, not two days later, after the MAX train stabbings, a man stuck his finger out of a window of his vehicle as he was driving. Fashioned it as a gun and

gestured, shot after shot, towards a minivan. This minivan had very obviously a Muslim woman sitting in the passenger seat. It was a Muslim Family actually... husband driving, wife passenger seat, baby in the back.

And this man began, you know, gesturing, pointing, and pulling a trigger of a gun with... this finger gun of his... and you know gesturing like, you know, death with his fingers over his throat trying to... blocks following these people, scaring them, trying to ram them off the road with his vehicle, swerving into them.

And, we were immediately notified of this within, I think half an hour of this even happening. And, we managed to within 72 hours identify the suspect, the vehicle, get witness testimonies, multiple witness testimonies, including his soon-to-be ex-wife.

We had the whole case wrapped up within 72 hours and delivered to Portland Police Bureau. And, it took almost 30 days for Portland Police to interview the victims, let alone detain the suspect, and again trying to work this process through the District Attorney's office, trying to get an investigative process going during these, these 25 days, and then threatening that we would go public. We would put out a press release for this inefficiency. And, in about... this being almost 30 days in, then they finally spoke to the family for the first time, the victims.

Timekeeper: About 30 seconds.

Seemab: Yeah. So with all this taking place, you know, stepping into current day with everything we know since the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McLean, we know that this culture of racism within law

enforcement is unified across the U.S. And, this protest movement for Black Lives Matter is unified because of it.

So, we find ourselves in a situation where we're dealing with an unknown now. Having the DA not prosecute most of these protesters and now having a state entity come in and file federal charges just to work around what DA Mike Schmidt has progressively done.

So, you know, we find ourselves, and we asked folks that you know... based on this new territory, and we asked the folks... that many of our friends in this legal field that they're navigating with total care and very little resources. It's the best that we can.

We ask for folks' awareness, amplification, and support in calling out the city and state and its complicity in the sanctioned violence against its protesters, who are ironically being mildly subjected to the mortal violence that Black and Indigenous bodies have faced for centuries, by a force that's been creating a minefield of protections against accountability.