

Co-founder of Muslim civil rights group resigns, cites discrimination

by [Aysha Khan](#) in the [August 25, 2021](#) issue



(AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

In a June 21 blog post, Farhana Khera, cofounder and executive director of the civil rights group Muslim Advocates, said she had been forced out of her role due to gender and religious discrimination.

At least four advisory council members have since resigned in protest, and the organization is now investigating Khera's complaints.

Meanwhile, a group of former Muslim Advocate employees anonymously published an open letter, claiming that Khera's management—along with that of former deputy director Naheed Qureshi, who resigned in May—had led to a “hostile” and “abusive” work environment that fostered mistreatment, racism, sexism, and labor exploitation.

“While the senior leadership of Muslim Advocates claimed to protect Muslims for the public and to funders, the same senior leaders mistreated staff, threatened retaliation, retaliated, and misrepresented staff complaints to the board,” former employees said in the June 22 letter.

The wide-ranging list of allegations includes dismissing staff concerns about exceeding legal limits on lobbying by 501(c)(3) nonprofits; screaming at and berating staff “often until they cried and/or quit”; making racist comments about Arab culture; treating staff as personal assistants; policing dress, appearance, and personalities of female staff; and more.

Some of Khera’s supporters have suggested that the open letter was part of an orchestrated smear campaign. Fatima Khan, a consultant who left the organization in support of Khera, suggested in her resignation letter that board members and senior leadership had “coordinated efforts” with the “former disgruntled staffers” behind the allegations she described as “false” and “apparently intended to defame and harm” Khera and Qureshi.

Muslim Advocates was founded in 2005 as an extension of the National Association of Muslim Lawyers to address anti-Muslim discrimination after the 9/11 attacks but came to prominence during protests against the Trump administration’s ban on travelers from certain Muslim-majority countries.

Khera has testified before Congress multiple times, and after announcing her resignation she received a wave of supportive tweets from prominent figures including Representative Ilhan Omar and Senator Dick Durbin. —Religion News Service