

My name is Muna Hassan and I am a first generation Somali American naturalized citizen and long term resident of the State of Oregon, and today I have the honor and privilege of speaking on the unfortunate rise in hate crimes in our dear state. My family and I had the considerable luck and fortune to come to America in the early 90's as refugees from Somalia. When the war broke out in the country we were forced to become refugees in Kenya and luckily we had the ability to relocate to the United States and become citizens of this wonderful country. My parent left everything they knew and loved in their country and came to the America with the hopes of living a safe, healthy, and peace filled lives for their family. They faced struggles assimilating to a new life coming from a war torn country but they worked hard and managed with the cards they were given.

When I was I was 5 my mother, father, sister, brother and I moved to Oregon where my father was offered a job at Hewlett Packard as a computer engineer. I grew up in Oregon wholeheartedly believing and knowing that I am a part of the fabric that not only makes this country but makes this state. It wasn't until after 9/11 that I came to the realization that there was anything different between me and anyone else. Because my family are Muslims we faced biased misjudgments based solely on our religion. I believe this occurred based on what typically cause hate, lack of understanding. This only helped me feel more American because this nation is made up of many people from various races, religions, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. I told myself I would never allow my patriotism to be questioned, or my love for the only country I have ever known and loved to be tainted by the horrible acts of monsters that created havoc in the name of what they claimed was religion.

My family came from a country that was destroyed by hate and lack of humanity, when I look at America I look at a nation that was forged by the collective effort of shared humanity. Not one that is based on the principle of hate, bigotry, racism, and judgement. I hope that this testimony will help to change the manner in which hate crimes are understood and dealt with in this great state.

One example of hate I have was on a summer day in 2017 at a local grocery store in Portland. My niece nephew and I went to the library earlier that day and decided we wanted to go get popsicles from the store as a treat. As we are approaching the store I noticed a woman behaving erratically and screaming at someone in the car. it wasn't until I saw her throw her groceries on the ground that I stopped to observe. I saw that she was yelling at a women wearing a headscarf in a car with two children in the backseat. The lady yelling was cursing and proceeded to start banging on the women's car in a threatening manner. I looked around and noticed several other customers idly watching but no one stepping to the plate to try and calm the situation down. So I told my niece and nephew to stand at a distance and I approached the lady yelling. I simply said "are you alright ma'am, you seem upset". She told me she was indeed not ok because this lady's car was parked too close to her car referring to the Muslim woman in the car, and she now couldn't get into her own vehicle.

In my mind it wouldn't warrant such behavior. So I calmly asked her had she tried telling her? To which she replied she already f'ing had. At this point the lady in the car who I now noticed was pregnant looked extremely upset not to mention the terrified looking children in the back. Her window was cracked open so I had asked her in Somali what was going on so that I could be fair. She told me that her sister was in the store and apparently the lady had gotten upset that the two cars were parked close together, which she understood. She had told the lady standing outside to be a bit patient she had called her sister and she would be coming outside to fix the situation. At this point the other lady started to scream and curse her out. I turned back to the lady and asked her if she wouldn't mind just waiting it seemed that this

woman was just trying to wait for her sister, not to mention she is pregnant and her and her children seem to be a bit scared. To this the lady replied she didn't give a flying f about this pregnant n word, terrorist. To say I was shocked was an understatement. She then proceeded to tell me that the pregnant lady should use her government benefits to go to a planned parenthood and abort her baby, then go back to her damn country. She then told me that the only reason I was helping her is based on my race and I should f off and mind my business. I told the lady in the car to call the police and I would stay near her until they arrived. This of course didn't make this woman happy because she was just spewing hate freely without restraint and no one to tell her that this behavior is not only unacceptable but it's harassment. She may have felt the strength to bully a scared pregnant woman, but I wasn't intimidated by her bully behavior.

When the police showed up I left them to do their job and went about my business. Some of the bystanders thanked me and asked why I had stepped up. The woman in the car could have been me, my mother, my sister, my friend or my neighbor and I would hope as a community we could have the decency to step in when we see wrong. The fact that people stood by as if watching a hate crime is normal deeply offended and impacted me.

The current political climate we live in has falsely embolden some to feel as if they can target those the deem to be "others", it has allowed further division and hatred to seep in to our societies. I believe it us up to us to change this climate of bigotry and discrimination, or forever be remembered as those who idly stood by. The only other that exists between humans is that which we allow to accept. Truth is irregardless of this woman's race, religion, or ethnic background I would still step up and defend her. If we can't live in a society where one feels safe to go shopping without harassment or help, there is something that needs to be done. I cannot idly sit by and normalize injustice and racism. We need more victims' advocates that can support people that have been through traumatic situations like this.

I myself have had many times where my friends and I have been unjustly profiled based solely on our skin color. One time my friend and I were sitting at an overview watching the sun set when we notice a neighborhood patrol car roll by. I thought nothing of it. Not more than 5 minute pass by a police car rolls up and shines their light on us, at this point I was wondering what was going on. The officer proceeds to ask us what our business was in the neighborhood, to which we replied just watching the sunset. I asked him if we were doing something wrong or if there was something in particular we could help him with. At this point the officer ignores my valid question and tells us to go about our business.

No one else had been approached and had a police light shined at them as if they were criminals. Our evening of freedom and enjoyment felt like it was disturbed. Rather than staying and enjoying our walk we quickly proceeded to leave feeling singled out and targeted. I felt targeted based on being in a area that I was deemed out of place. Why does anyone have the right to make me feel like that I am unwelcome? The police are meant to protect and defend, who was being protected that evening and what was there to defend? There are many cases such as this that occur and make people feel lack of trust in the authorities for fear of being profiled or sadly in time of danger for protection. I believe I have as much as a right to be here to feel safe and protected. To not always feel like I should be sure I am wanted in an area for fear of being stopped by the police based upon my skin tone. I shouldn't have to second guess myself if police are there to help me or help others from me.

Another such incident where I experienced a hate crime was one day as I was leaving work and heading home. A man had stopped me and asked me for some change, when I

politely told him I couldn't help him he became very angry. He started aggressively walking towards me and calling me a dirty n word that deserved to be beat up. At this point I was very afraid so I told him to leave me alone and began to walk away. This man followed me for half of a block all the while hurling nasty insults in my direction. He told me that my kind wasn't wanted around here anymore and I should take myself back to Africa where a dirty n word like me belonged. I told him I would call the police if he didn't leave me alone, this didn't seem to change his mind or his manner of communication with me. This man seemed to believe that he had not only the right to insult me but the right to follow me and make threats to harm me. Thankfully I was able to leave the situation immediately and not have to deal with the any physical repercussions of his hateful actions. The level of fear I felt that day, and many other days will not leave me. I am hoping that the aforementioned situations sheds a light on my experience and the high expectation I have of the members of this hearing to do what needs to be done so that we all feel safe and protected as one.

