



Governor’s Commission on Middle Eastern American Affairs

Virtual ZOOM
Thursday, September 18, 2025
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present:

Ammar Abdulhamid, Member
Shivaani Arya, Member
Athar Bayoumi, Member
Alissa Deaver, Member
Gunay Evinch, Member
Rabbi Dr. Susan Grossman, Member
Dr. Ayesha A. Gulistan, Member
Mohammad Khalil, Member
Mona Kishore, Chair
Dr. Aharona (Roni) Rosenthal, Member
Ala’a Wafa, Vice Chair

Commissioners Absent:

Dr. Majd AlGhatrif, Member
Dr. Amal K. Ali, Member
Anthony Browder, Member
Rafi Rone, Member

GOCI Staff:

- ❖ Greg Yancey, Chief of Staff for GOCI
- ❖ Dr. Antwan Brown, Administrative Director for GOCI
- ❖ Cheryl Madigan – Executive Assistant for GOCI

I. Call to Order:

Mona Kishore, Chair – Meeting called to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. Commission Roll Call:

Chair Mona Kishore called on each commissioner.

III. Adoption of Agenda:

Motion	1 st	2 nd	Vote
To adopt the agenda	Ala’a Wafa	Ammar Abdulhamid	11Y-0N-0A



IV. **Chair's Remarks:**

Chair Mona Kishore spoke about the events that she and the commissioners have attended and wanted to provide details on the three she attended.

- **Pops in the Park** – this event was with the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra (ASO) and Commissioner Ammar Abdulhamid worked with Conductor José-Luis Novo.
 - Commissioner Abdulhamid stated that the commission and ASO have a partnership. He provided the conductor with recommendations of pieces of music from Middle Eastern composers. He is now working with the ASO to create an event for the Maryland 250 Anniversary celebration in 2026, but he needs help from fellow commissioners to achieve this. A working group has already been formed for this task and Chair Kishore has plans to meet with the ASO in October.
- **3rd Annual DC Arab Cultural Festival 2025** – one of the vendors at the event was Commissioner Athar Bayoumi. The event was family-oriented with music and food.
 - Commissioner Bayoumi stated the event celebrated different cultures of the Middle East. DJ Basbousa was the organizer of this event, and she would be great to work with for future events. She was vending there to fundraise money for a school in Egypt. Chair Kishore will send pics through their WhatsApp group.
- **GOCI Ethnic Commission's Chairs Get-together** – they spoke about the alignment of topics and subjects they all shared and came up with two threads.
 - Representation of small businesses in their communities. They want to do more for the small businesses and there was a canceled event with the Chamber of Commerce, and they hope it will be rescheduled.
 - Focus groups that mirrored what the other commissions are doing.

The chair asked for other commissioners to speak on their events that they attended.

- Commissioner Susan Grossman attended the annual meeting with the Jewish Federation of Howard County and attended the Howard County Interfaith Clergy Alliances.
- Chair Kishore attended an Egyptian Cultural Festival at the Egyptian Coptic Church, which they have interest in working with the commission in the future.
- Vice Chair Ala'a Wafa announced that there will be two events starting Friday through Sunday at Saints Paul and Peter Church in Potomac and at the Armenian Church in Bethesda.

V. **GOCI Remarks:**

Chief of Staff, Greg Yancey, spoke about how grateful he is for all the things that the commissioners are doing.



VI. Approval of Minutes:

Motion	1 st	2 nd	Vote
Approval of the 07/24/25 & 08/12/25 Minutes	Ammar Abdulhamid	Ala'a Wafa	11Y-0N-0A

VII. Standing Committees:

- ❖ Education & Health Committee:
Commissioner Ayesha Gulistan reported on the work that the committee has been doing with the Howard County Public School System (HCPS). They are working on a pilot program but haven't been able to move forward with the plans due to the summer. The next scheduled meeting will be on October 10th. The program will be implemented with their teachers. There is a concern for the cost of this program, which is \$20,000. They will be planning the committee's next meeting soon.
- ❖ Local Engagement & Inclusion:
Vice Chair Ala'a Wafa spoke about creating Roundtables. They received information from the GCOHLAA commission.

VIII. Working Groups:

- ❖ Event Planning – **Commissioner Alissa Deavers** met with **Chair Mona Kishore** to discuss the Retreat that will be held on October 26th. She sent her an agenda and there will be some funding to do to pay for the venue (\$450.00). As for food, it will be a cultural potluck for commissioners to bring a dish.

Motion on the Venue for the Retreat:

Motion	1 st	2 nd	Vote
To approve the \$450 for the cost of the venue (The Journey Space) for the retreat.	Alissa Deavers	Gunay Evinch	11Y-0N-0A

Amendment to the Venue Motion:

Motion	1 st	2 nd	Vote
To approve the \$450 for the cost of the venue (The Journey Space) for the retreat. If this venue doesn't work out, then they will want to use GOCI's conference room.	Alissa Deavers	Gunay Evinch	11Y-0N-0A



- ❖ Interfaith Programs – **Commissioner Susan Grossman** mentioned the partnership with the Institute of Islamic Christian and Jewish Studies. They are sponsoring a program called Common Ground. This program brings clergy of different faiths together in their localities, mixed by faith identities and by gender. This project was referred to our commission by Dr. Hargrove from GOCI. She would like to reach out to the APAA and SAAA commission chairs to assist in the Howard County Pilot Program. This might help with the funding of the program.
- ❖ Partnerships/Focus Groups – **Commissioner Rafi Rone** is absent, and no report provided.
- ❖ Strategic Communication/Legislation – **Commissioner Mohammad Khalil** was present, no updates.
- ❖ Strategy Planning – **Chair Mona Kishore** was present, no updates reported.

IX. New Business / Old Business:

- ❖ **NEW – Baltimore Road Closures** – **Commissioner Athar Bayoumi** mentioned she is working with Dr. Brown on fifteen Middle Eastern businesses that are in downtown Baltimore that are affected by road closures due to a recent fire. This affects four blocks, which the rail is closed, and people can't get to their businesses. Also, working on paperwork on how to report hate crimes. Commissioner Gulistan asked about the Faith in Community: Opioid/Overdose Forum being held in September. She wanted information on what will be shared at this event and Dr. Brown stated that he didn't have an agenda yet, but it is led by the Lieutenant Governor's office and GOCI's Dr. Hargrove. The name of the event is Faith in Community: Opioid/Overdose Forum. Commission Susan Grossman educated the commission with the Jewish October holidays.
- ❖ **OLD - Dr. Antwan Brown** stated that he is working on Social Studies with Vice Chair Wafa and Commissioner Bayoumi. VC Wafa elaborated that this consists of data on Middle Eastern content that reflects their histories. This information comes from the County and State levels. She recommends that GOCI obtains the information on all the commissions. There were suggestions to have a community input to go into decision making with education policy changes. These recommendations would be sent over to the governor's office for review.

X. GOCI's Remarks:

Dr. Antwan Brown stated he wants all commissioners to take the Open Meeting Act training. Please email Dr. Brown and Cheryl Madigan with your certifications.

XI. Open Discussion:

Chair Mona Kishore informed everyone that their next meeting will be November 13th and there will be a guest speaker for the Native Americans Initiative to talk about workforce development for skilled immigrants.

XI. Motion for Adjournment:

Motion	1 st	2 nd	Vote
Adjourn the meeting at 7:34 p.m.	Ala'a Wafa	Ammar Abdulhamid	11Y-0N-0A