

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4305

April 11, 2025

The Honorable Harmeet Dhillon
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Assistant Attorney General Dhillon,

I write to recommend the Department of Justice open a civil rights investigation into whether a potential planned community in Texas would violate federal law. Specifically, I am concerned that a master-planned “community of thousands of Muslims”¹ could violate the constitutional rights of Jewish and Christian Texans, by preventing them from living in this new community and discriminating against them within the community. I further encourage the Department to investigate whether Christians, Jews, and other non-Muslim minorities would receive equal protection under the law in this new community.² Religious discrimination, whether explicit or implicit, is unconstitutional under the First and Fourteenth Amendments. Religious freedom is a cornerstone of our nation’s values, and I am concerned this community potentially undermines this vital protection.

The East Plano Islamic Center and the for-profit corporation it created to plan this city recently announced a development called “EPIC Ranches City” in Josephine, Texas.³ The City would be a “thriving ecosystem” of thousands of homes centered around a mosque and a private Islamic school.⁴ The 402-acre community will also include commercial developments, a community college, and sports facilities. The Center is designed as an

¹ Nick Wood & Adrian Ashford, *They dream of building Muslim-centric neighborhoods near Dallas. Will it work?*, DALLAS MORNING NEWS, Feb. 24, 2025, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/faith/2025/02/24/they-dream-of-building-muslim-centric-neighborhoods-near-dallas-will-it-work/>.

² U.S. CONST. amend. XIV, § 1.

³ EPIC Ranches Vision, *Epic Ranches* (2025), <https://theepicranches.com/>; Penelope Rivera, *Texas AG opens investigation into East Plano Islamic Center development*, KERA, Mar. 25, 2025, <https://www.keranews.org/government/2025-03-25/east-plano-islamic-center-development-paxton-paxton-abbott>.

⁴ Wood & Ashford, *supra* note 1.

exclusive religious settlement where Islamic principles govern not only daily life and education, but commerce.

I want to particularly call attention to the language the Center's corporation, Community Capital Partners, has used to advertise this development. Community Capital Partners has made clear the homes would be for sale to noncitizens from other countries, and that sales would be restricted to those who "contribute to the overall makeup of [the] community." After questions from the Dallas Morning News, the developer changed this language to hide their clear intentions, but they still admit the underlying goal, saying that the community would "conduct thorough individualized assessments of prospective buyers to ensure they align with [their] goals." These stealth edits, only in response to questions, create an impression of potential discrimination. I am concerned that the Center, through its for-profit affiliated entity, is attempting to create an enclave that will discriminate on the basis of religion, and, further, is hiding this intent from the public. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 explicitly prohibits discrimination in housing sales, rentals, and financing based on race, religion, or national origin.⁵ The primary goal of this landmark legislation was to combat housing segregation and ensure equal access to housing opportunities. The developer's description is a reason for caution and indicates the Center's practices may be in violation of federal law.

Governor Abbott has opened several investigations at the state level.⁶ These include an inquiry into the funeral home operating without the required license, a review of whether investors have been fully informed, and an examination of potential violations of consumer protection laws related to the development.⁷ Governor Abbott further announced that the Texas State Securities Board is investigating the Center "for potential failures to comply with applicable state and federal securities requirements, including protections against fraud."⁸ Finally, I note that the Governor, in coordination with the Texas Workforce Commission has opened an investigation under the Texas Fair Housing Act.⁹ This law, like the federal Fair Housing Act, prohibits housing discrimination on the basis of religion and explicitly bans any advertising that expresses a preference, limitation, or discrimination based on religion. I encourage the Department to coordinate with Texas-based officials in their important efforts to confirm that this community will not violate the law.

⁵ 42 U.S. Code § 3604.

⁶ Press Release, Governor Greg Abbott, Governor Abbot Announces Investigation Into Unlawful Discrimination By East Plano Islamic Center (Mar. 28, 2025) <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-announces-investigation-into-unlawful-discrimination-by-east-plano-islamic-center>.

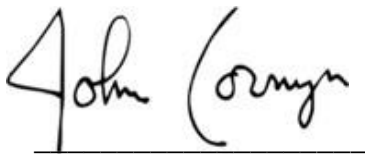
⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Press Release, Governor Greg Abbott, Governor Abbott Directs Texas Rangers To Open Criminal Investigation Into East Plano Islamic Center (Mar. 31, 2025), <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-directs-texas-rangers-to-open-criminal-investigation-into-east-plano-islamic-center>.

⁹ See *supra* note 6.

In conclusion, I recommend the Department investigate the community's impact on the rights of Jewish and Christian Texans. I also encourage the Department to take steps ensure that Christians, Jews, and other non-Muslim minorities will receive equal protection under the laws in this development. Religious-based discrimination is a constitutional violation as well as a federal rights violation. Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that this community does not run afoul of these obligations. It may also be appropriate for an investigation to explore whether the proponents of the proposed development are abiding by existing federal and state prohibitions on the enforcement of sharia law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Cornyn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

John Cornyn
Unites States Senator