

Senate Testimony - Cameron.pdf

Uploaded by: Cameron Carden

Position: FAV

Good Afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I applied to Salisbury University on the recommendation of my football coach at Western New England University. He said it would do me good to return to my home state of Maryland, and he specifically praised the academic culture at Salisbury. And he was right: as I made clear during the appeals process and since, I enjoyed being at Salisbury University. The professors were engaging and attentive to student needs, and the campus felt like a safe, supportive place to learn - until, of course, it suddenly ceased to.

When racist graffiti appeared in the liberal arts building, the first thing that entered my head was not "who could have done this?" as you might expect. As a young black man, I'm no stranger to confronting racist comments and threats, even in our schools. In the weeks leading up to the graffiti, groups of students would yell out the n-word in common areas, something I've grown accustomed to ignoring.

So, when the graffiti escalated to the point of threatening another Sandy Hook massacre, I - and any black student reading that graffiti - knew the answer to "who could have done this?", and it's terrifying. Anybody could have done it, including people with whom they take classes and share a living space.

The next question a person asks himself in that position is, "is this just an idle threat or could they actually act on it?" And, unfortunately, we all know the answer. They absolutely can - as someone who remembers Virginia Tech knows all too well. So you have someone who is targeting black people and promising the very real possibility of a massacre, where you attend school, and you're somehow supposed to focus on your studies.

To be clear, I tried to focus on my studies. I tried to reach out and seek help. But my concerns over my own safety were all-encompassing and made it impossible to function. This was no different than if I had suffered a debilitating physical injury: with every fiber in my being I wanted to continue my education, but it was simply impossible to accomplish.

When my story made the news, the main focus was on how unresponsive the University administration was at first. For my purposes, the faculty who I spoke to about my situation were compassionate and, to the best of their ability, helpful. However, they knew that their hands were tied by regulations that refused to give mental anguish its place alongside physical injury, which affected the tone with which they approached my case. Rather than doing everything in their power to help me restore mental balance, they ultimately worsened matters by emphasizing that my situation was about to cost my family thousands of dollars - absolutely the last thing you want to hear in the middle of a crisis.

House Bill 872, if passed, means that, should a similarly racially-charged incident surface, students will not have the added burden of considering lost money while also fearing for their health and safety. This is an immensely important piece of legislation, and I thank you all for considering it.

Written Testimony Henson.docx (2).pdf

Uploaded by: Delegate Henson

Position: FAV

SHANEKA HENSON
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Appropriations Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 4, 2022

Chair Paul G. Pinsky
Vice Chair Cheryl C. Kagan
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee.

Thank you for considering HB872 “University System of Maryland – Student Withdrawal – Reimbursement of Tuition and Fees (The Cameron Carden Act of 2022)”. This bill will allow students to safely and efficiently withdraw from universities within Maryland’s educational system under certain, extenuating circumstances that pose a threat to the student’s physical or mental well-being.

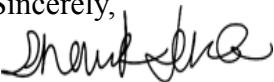
Currently, the state of Maryland has no requirement of reimbursement to be made for students needing to withdraw based upon health restrictions. Each institution is free to construct its own policies on the matter, and many have in place allowances to be made for those withdrawing because of physical injury, illness, or hospitalization. While we commend individual institutions for making these policies, it is time this became standardized across our state university system. However, standardization will not go far enough, if we don’t also take into account our students’ mental health and wellness as well. HB872 would do just that.

With all that is going on in our world today, we must do more to care for the mental and emotional health of young Marylanders, and do all we can to remove barriers from their accessing the care they need. No student should have to decide between receiving the care they need, and losing thousands of dollars. This was the decision faced by Cameron Carden, for whom this bill is named, this last year. Because of racially charged events on campus generally, and personally being a target of racism, Cameron’s mental health began to suffer.

However, not wanting to lose his tuition money, Cameron attempted to persevere in his classes. His family began to notice changes in his behavior and demeanor, and upon the encouragement from his concerned parents and in light of his deteriorating mental wellbeing, he chose to withdraw. Despite these circumstances, Cameron received no reimbursements for the semester due to his inability to meet the time constraints the university had imposed.

Unfortunately, this is true for many students, the full number we cannot know. How many students across our state are silently suffering because of the financial consequences of caring for their own mental health? Unfortunately, our health and wellbeing do not often align with nicely written timelines in University policy books. A favorable report on HB872 is important because mental and physical health and wellbeing must take precedence over financial concerns. Even outside of the discussion of timelines, withdrawal terms relative to mental health are incredibly discretionary, with each university individually deeming what is fit enough to constitute a withdrawal, many choosing to not ever recognize mental health as a reasonable cause of withdrawal.

The goal of this bill is to help students, like Cameron, who encounter these sorts of circumstances, to seek reimbursement from their university. Hospitalizations, physical injuries, and mental illness are almost never expected. Students do not foresee such things happening during their semesters. This bill allows already suffering students to not be forced to make such a decision between health and finances. For this reason, I urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,


Delegate Shaneka Henson

Senate Testimony - Gay.pdf

Uploaded by: Gay Green-Carden

Position: FAV

Good Afternoon, and thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony.

When I testified before the Appropriations Committee, I did so as an advocate for those suffering from mental trauma and anguish, and as a person financing a student's higher education. Today, though, I come before you in my most important role, and one which many of you share: that of a parent.

As a parent, nothing is more important than your child's health and wellbeing, both physical and mental. Even in the throes of adolescence, when your child is at their least communicative, you develop a sixth sense for when something is out of order. Within seconds of asking your child how they're doing, you know if they're being burdened by something, even if they don't openly acknowledge as much.

That's what happened the weekend of October 11, 2019, when I visited my son Cameron for Salisbury University's Parent Weekend. Even though he assured me that everything was normal, it was clear to me, as his mother, that he was out of sorts. Sure enough, by the following Monday, he was texting me saying that he feared for his safety and needed to leave campus. That's when it emerged that Cameron was experiencing all kinds of racial animus at Salisbury - from having the n-word shouted at him in common areas to the appearance of sexually- and racially-charged graffiti.

The events that followed are well-documented in the public record, including Cameron's withdrawal from Salisbury and the University's refusal to consider fearing for one's safety as an "extenuating circumstance." As I said in my committee testimony, nobody - *nobody* - should feel compelled to place themselves - or, heaven forbid, their *child* - in perceived danger over financial obligations. Yet that is what the University administration, through their words and actions, sought to do - an injustice that this bill rightly seeks to prevent from recurring.

In my professional life, I interact routinely with mental health practitioners and patients, and I see firsthand how our society ignores, disregards, or outright dismisses their struggles simply because they lack the visibility of a wheelchair, a crutch, or a cast. Many suffer in silence for years out of a belief that you can just "will away" debilitating symptoms of anxiety, depression, or other conditions such as bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and schizophrenia. I mention these conditions by name because they often emerge during late adolescence and early adulthood - the same years when many attend college.

To be clear, what we are discussing are indeed "extenuating circumstances": circumstances that make it impossible for a student to attend class, to engage in coursework, and to be a functioning part of the university community. I applaud this body for its past work to destigmatize mental illness and study how best to address mental health in our state's university system. This bill is a crucial next step toward making sure that our institutes of higher education are a safe and supportive place for our young people to grow as intellectuals and as citizens.

Thank you again for taking the time to consider my testimony, and thanks again to Delegate Henson for her tireless work in this area. As a parent, as one who interacts in the mental health space, and as a proud, lifelong Marylander, I look forward to seeing the successful passage of this bill into law.

Cameron Carden Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Susan Rich

Position: FAV

Susan D. Rich, MD, MPH, DFAPA

House Bill: HB0872

Senate Bill: SB

Dear Esteemed Legislators:

It is with honor and urgency that I speak to you on behalf of Maryland's transitional age college students in support of the Cameron Carden Act. Although I do not speak on behalf of any of these organizations, I am past President of the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry of Greater Washington, a member of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Distinguished Fellow in the American Psychiatric Association, and a member of the American Medical Association. I give annual lectures at George Washington University and have given lectures and grand rounds at University of Maryland Student Health Services, Johns Hopkins University, Georgetown University, Springfield Hospital in Sykesville, and many other teaching hospitals across the US, Canada and Lithuania. I have not been paid by anyone to give this testimony and am not here today speaking as anyone's psychiatrist.

As a private practice child/adolescent psychiatrist in Montgomery County since 2006, I have seen many of Maryland's college students in my home office. Like other transitional age youth, college students are still finding themselves and their place in the world. Most of the college students I have seen as new patients have had difficulty transitioning to college, many of them leaving school in the middle of the semester due to mental health reasons, life stressors, or other extraordinary circumstances. Typically, if they are doing well enough to make it to the end of the semester, they are usually able to stay where they are until they are able to transfer to a different school.

The cost of education on individuals and families is extraordinary. I know something about this as I paid my way through an undergraduate degree in microbiology, a graduate degree in public health and a medical degree. The issue in question is that of reimbursement for tuition at in-state universities if an extraordinary circumstance happens after the deadline for reimbursement has passed. Cameron Carden's case exemplifies such a circumstance. He had grown up in the Annapolis area, excelled academically and in football at the Annapolis Christian School, graduated from the St. Thomas Moore Prep School in Massachusetts and entered the Western New England University in Massachusetts to play football as a freshman. At that point, he was a well-adjusted college student athlete with good self-esteem, resilience, well-spoken, and good citizenship. As the youngest of his siblings, Cameron really wanted to be back in Maryland closer to family where his parents could see him play football. His coach in Massachusetts had graduated from Salisbury University, which influenced Cameron's decision to transfer there. My understanding is that he loved the campus at Salisbury, was impressed by the school's mission, and was excited that his parents could attend some of his games. Unfortunately, a series of traumatic experiences early in his first semester led to him developing fears of attending class, heightened stress response, and other symptoms that progressively worsened leading to him leaving school. At this point, Cameron meets diagnostic criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder with severe panic attacks that have affected his ability to function in social situations.

How did a socially-confident, independent, well-adjusted student athlete end up with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder at one of our state's college campuses? Cameron witnessed racist graffiti for the first time in his life, with a derogatory sexual comment and demoralizing racial slur. It was a shock to his naïve nervous system, having been relatively cocooned in predominantly private Caucasian schools where he was included in all aspects of the schools and sports. The demeaning, insulting words left him traumatized, leading to trouble sleeping, focusing, and attending classes out of increasing anxiety, panic symptoms, and fear. When the school painted over the graffiti and it reappeared over night, it confirmed Cameron's anxiety and fear that the school would not be able to keep him safe. He then sought the counsel of a professor who told him simply "Don't let those 'pr*cks' get to you" (paraphrased), but nothing substantial was done and the episode was not reported. Around that time, while walking to class, he heard someone shout the N* word. He had never experienced this degree of hate, slander and trauma of systemic racism that other students may have been more desensitized to. Living in that community with triggers for the anxiety eventually led him to call his parents to go home. When they met with the school, the attitude and messages he heard from administration were confusing – "If you leave now that the

deadline has passed, your parents will lose their money (from tuition).” He assured them that it did not matter, that his mental health was more important and that he would pay his parents back.

While Cameron has moved on with his life and education here in Maryland, he and his parents are having to bear the burden of owing Salisbury University the tuition for his first semester there. In my opinion, the impact of the horrific racist graffiti on Cameron’s mental health functioning was a catastrophic and extraordinary circumstance that should have been considered when Cameron requested his tuition reimbursement. There are many other students like Cameron who decide to leave shortly after the reimbursement deadline has passed. Since private elementary and secondary schools have tuition insurance options, perhaps we should consider that in our state.

I feel very strongly as a child/adolescent psychiatrist that The Cameron Carden Act is an example of what we can do in our state to help support families who are already putting so much into their children’s education. Thank you so much for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan D. Rich, MD, MPH, DFAPA
Child/Adolescent & Adult Psychiatrist

HB872_USM_FWA_EHE.pdf

Uploaded by: Andy Clark

Position: FWA



SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
House Bill 872
University System of Maryland - Student Withdrawal - Reimbursement of Tuition and Fees
April 5, 2022
Favorable with Amendment

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and committee members, House Bill 872 requires each public institution of higher education to adopt a policy authorizing students to withdraw for extenuating circumstances such as illness, injury, hospitalization and mental health and wellness. The bill was amended in the House and the USM supports the bill before the committee today.

University System of Maryland institutions work closely with students experiencing challenges with physical and mental health to help them complete their studies or return to campus after a hiatus. Presently, each USM institution has specific policies and processes to support these students.

One commonality is that withdrawal policies begin with the first day of instruction and the failure to attend the university or attend classes does not change this policy. Institutions and students must consider the implications of withdrawal for the purposes of the return of federal financial *or Return of Title IV funds (R2T4)*. For the student, the percentage of funds returned decrease in the first three weeks of a semester. The funds schedule may vary campus-to-campus, but generally, students can expect a 90% refund in the 1st week; 50% in the second week; and 25% in the 3rd week. Regardless, students receiving Title IV federal financial aid must complete exit counseling as a condition of their loan agreement. That process begins here: <https://studentaid.gov/exit-counseling/> Beyond that timeframe, our focus is to work with students so that they may complete the course successfully.

As an example, at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, an existing Exception to Enrollment Policy receives approximately 200 applications. The school approved 33% of them. In many cases, the student was able to receive a W grade, which allowed them to withdraw from a course instead of failing. Further, for extenuating circumstances in which the student's verified last date of attendance/participation in the course was during the published refund period, in addition to the retroactive enrollment adjustment (i.e. grade change from F to W), the student is refunded accordingly.

Thank you for allowing the USM to share these thoughts regarding House Bill 872.



About the University System of Maryland

The University System of Maryland (USM)—one system made up of 12 institutions, three regional centers, and a central office—awards 8 out of every 10 bachelor’s degrees in the State of Maryland. The USM is governed by a Board of Regents, comprised of 21 members from diverse professional and personal backgrounds. The chancellor, Dr. Jay Perman, oversees and manages the operations of USM. However, each constituent institution is run by its own president who has authority over that university. Each of USM’s 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes Historically Black Colleges and Universities, comprehensive institutions, research universities, and the country’s largest public online institution.