

**Committee:** Senate Education, Energy and Environment

**Testimony on:** HB295 - University System of Maryland - Student Withdrawal - Reimbursement of Tuition and Fees (Cameron Carden Act of 2023)

**Position:** Favorable

21 March 2023

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and the members of the EEE Committee,

The University of Maryland – College Park, Student Government Association supports HB295 that allows 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.

My name is Nelson Chen, and I serve as one of two Arts and Humanities Representatives for the University of Maryland’s Student Government Association. As you may know, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated a root issue in American society: the mental health crisis. Statistics reported millions of physical casualties, and the new coronavirus variant was to blame. However, this was more than a physical war; the war on America's mental health remained hidden under stigmas and a lack of sensitivity. I firmly believe this is an issue that permeates all aspects of American life, including the lives of students in universities.

I entered university during the pandemic, and the risk of COVID-19 combined with news of deaths increasing by the day led to my mental health deteriorating. I faced depression my first year of college, and I felt alone as I stared at a screen to attend my classes. This is the reality of many American college students who enrolled during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the lasting effects of the mental health crisis are still felt today. The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed many financial burdens on families as well. Knowing how much my family was paying for a first-generation college student like me to attend college, I felt the pressure to succeed during a time when my mental health was at an all-time low. The financial difficulties stacked onto my mental health illness, and I became scared to fail.

Yes, I recognize we are in a post-COVID-19 pandemic world. However, the lasting legacy of the mental health crisis is another stressor to those who have extenuating circumstances regarding physical or mental health well-being. The ability to withdraw from Maryland universities while being fully reimbursed for that semester is a must if Maryland recognizes the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our youth. Maryland must align itself with decisions that reflect values of a more just, equitable, and accessible education for all.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB295.

Thank you,



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