

HB192_Del.Woods Testimony 02.17.pdf

Uploaded by: Jamila Woods

Position: FAV

JAMILA J. WOODS
Legislative District 26
Prince George's County

Judiciary Committee

Criminal Subcommittee

Chair, Juvenile Subcommittee

Public Safety Subcommittee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony for HB192 - Maryland Higher Education Commission - Religious Educational Institutions - Certificate of Approval

Good afternoon, Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee.

For the record, my name is Delegate Jamila Woods, and I am here today to request a favorable report on **House Bill 192**, legislation concerning religious educational institutions and the Certificate of Approval process under the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

House Bill 192 addresses a narrow but significant regulatory conflict that has existed since statutory changes in 2013. Prior to the 2013 statutory change, Maryland recognized the distinct role of religious educational institutions and allowed qualifying institutions operating exclusively for religious education and ministry to function under a religious exemption without undergoing the full Certificate of Approval process.

After the 2013 changes, institutions seeking to maintain both religious exemption status and accreditation recognized by the United States Department of Education were required to complete a two stage Certificate of Approval process. The process includes substantial application fees, documentation requirements, on site visits, and structural standards that were designed for large non-religious institutions. For small faith-based colleges serving limited populations, those requirements have proven financially and operationally unworkable.

This has created an unintended regulatory conflict. To maintain a religious exemption under Maryland law, an institution must provide exclusively sectarian instruction. However, accrediting bodies recognized by the federal government often require general education components such as English or mathematics. Institutions attempting to meet accreditation standards risk losing their exemption, while institutions attempting to preserve their exemption cannot satisfy accreditation

requirements. As a result, they are effectively trapped between two conflicting regulatory pathways.

House Bill 192 restores clarity. It allows qualifying religious institutions that are accredited by a federally recognized accrediting body to operate without duplicative state certification, provided they meet the strict statutory criteria already outlined in law. Those criteria remain intact. Institutions must be established for religious purposes, offer programs solely for religious vocations, and clearly identify the religious nature of their degrees.

This bill does not create broad deregulation. It is narrowly tailored and impacts only a small number of long-standing institutions authorized to operate in Maryland prior to the statutory changes and serve exclusively religious educational functions. The intent is not to weaken oversight, but to correct a conflict that has already forced some institutions to close and threaten others with similar outcomes.

Maple Springs Baptist Bible College and Seminary has operated for decades, serving adult learners and working professionals seeking theological education. Following the 2013 changes, it received a cease-and-desist order because it could no longer reconcile the accreditation standards with the religious exemption framework. House Bill 192 provides a path forward so that similarly situated institutions are not placed in that position.

Maryland has long-balanced, appropriate higher education oversight with respect for religious liberty. House Bill 192 preserves that balance. It removes redundant administrative burdens that do not enhance consumer protection, while maintaining clear statutory guardrails around what qualifies as a religious educational institution.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 192.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Delegate Jamila J. Woods
Maryland House of Delegates
District 26 – Prince George's County

Support for HB0192 - Ball Revision.pdf

Uploaded by: Marquez Ball

Position: FAV

Dr. Marquez Ball
8606 Wendy St.
Clinton, MD. 20735

February 13, 2026

Re: Support of HB0192 -Maryland Higher Education Commission - Religious Educational Institutions - Certificate of Approval

Dear Committee Members:

First, thank you for your service to the Maryland public on policy and legal issues that impact us the most, especially on matters of education, energy and the environment.

I am writing in support of HB0192, a bill to permit religious institutions that received an exemption from the Maryland Higher Education Commission before January 1, 2013 when the state legislature changed the requirements for **religious exempt institutions who are accredited. The change nullified religious exemption for accredited institutions and required the institutions to seek state certification.**

As an alumni of Maple Springs Baptist Bible College & Seminary, a religious institution that initially received its Maryland state certification as a religious institution on October 20, 1989, Maple Springs has afforded me to obtain my BA in 2009. I have since used my education to promote the aims and goals of Maple Springs in furtherance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I currently serve as President at Maple Springs Baptist Bible College and Seminary and Pastor of Uplift Church.

Maple Springs has been the only religious institution that provides a great sectarian education at an affordable price. With the rising costs of post-secondary education and increases in the daily cost of living (food and groceries prices for example), having an affordable post-secondary option is refreshing and necessary.

Celebrating its 40th year of existence this year, Maple Springs wants to continue its great tradition by operating as originally certified by the state.

Please support HB0192 by voting favorably out of this Committee.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marquez Ball

Regulatory Impact on Religious Higher Education Institutions

Case Brief: Maple Springs Baptist Bible College & Seminary

Executive Summary for Legislators

Strategic Context

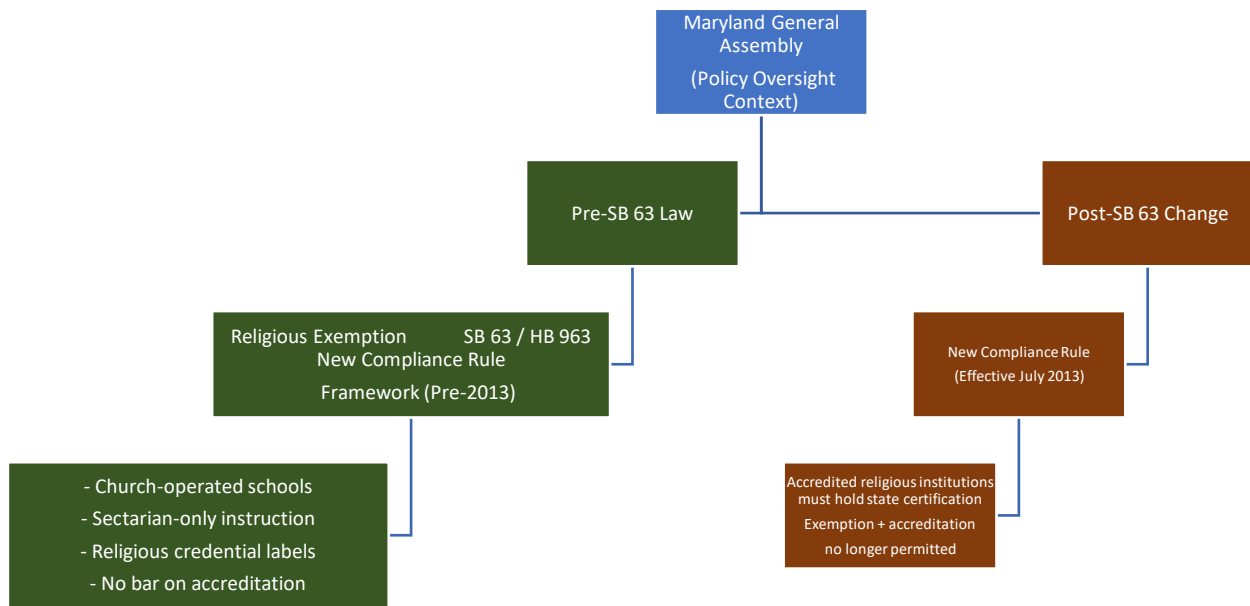
- SB 63 modernized oversight of religious postsecondary institutions.
- It unintentionally created a **compliance cliff** for legacy religious colleges that were **both accredited and exempt prior to 2013**.

Operational Reality

- Maple Springs was legally compliant for decades.
- SB 63 retroactively changed eligibility conditions.
- Transition application was initiated but not finalized.
- Enforcement occurred years later without resolution pathway closure.

Policy Risk Area

- Regulatory transition management
- Institutional due process timelines
- Administrative backlog accountability
- Faith-based education continuity



Tamara Davis Brown Support HB0192.pdf

Uploaded by: Tamara Brown

Position: FAV

P.O. Box 1292
Clinton, MD 20735

February 13, 2026

VIA EMAIL

Delegate Ben Barnes, Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
121 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Support of HB0192 -Higher Education - Religious Educational Institutions -
Certificate of Approval

Dear Chairman Barnes and House Committee Members:

First, thank you for your service to the Maryland public on policy and legal issues that impact us the most, especially on matters of education, energy and the environment.

I am writing in support of HB0192, a bill to permit religious institutions that received an exemption from the Maryland Higher Education Commission before January 1, 2013 when the state legislature changed the requirements for **religious exempt institutions who are accredited. The change nullified religious exemption for accredited institutions and required the institutions to seek state certification.** There are eight (8) other institutions of higher learning negatively impacted by this 2013 change in the Maryland Higher Education law, one of which, Washington Bible College, had to officially close its doors.

The proposed bill will still require the nine (9) remaining state religious institutions to bi-yearly file and comply with the Maryland Higher Education religious exemption requirements. Moreover, these institutions had all completed the state certification process and operational prior 2013. An illustrative chart and map of the timeline of events is attached for your consideration.

As a _____ [year] graduate of Maple Springs Baptist Bible College & Seminary, a religious institution that initially received its Maryland state certification as a religious institution on October 20, 1989, Maple Springs has been a foundational and educational stalwart for many pastors, ministers and lay leadership in the state and District of Columbia and Virginia. Maple Springs has afforded me to _____

What distinguishes Maple Springs institution from all other so-called theological institutions is that non-sectarian courses solely Bible-based. The institution over its 40-year history remains unapologetic in its Christian worldview and instruction. Its sole mission is to further the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Maple Springs has been the only religious institution that provides a great sectarian education at an affordable price. With the rising costs of post-secondary education and increases

in the daily cost of living (food and groceries prices for example), having an affordable post-secondary option is refreshing and necessary.

Celebrating its 40th year of existence this year, Maple Springs wants to continue its great tradition by operating as originally certified by the state.

Please support HB0192 by voting favorably out of this Committee.

Sincerely,

/s/ TAMARA DAVIS BROWN

Enclosure

2026 HB0192 UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Mathew Goldstein

Position: UNF



<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfU0l1WSdNH0XUz2uYdt4zf-ztmwuTz-rdKJ59WbJstj1Ylw/viewform>

February 17 2026

HB 192 - UNF

Higher Education - Religious Educational Institutions - Certificate of Approval

Dear Chair [Ben Barnes](#), **Vice Chair** [Anne R. Kaiser](#), and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

This bill exempting some religious schools from the regulations for obtaining a certificate of approval, and for requesting an exemption, is counter-productive and should be rejected in committee. The existing regulations describing the academic standards that private schools are required to meet to obtain a certificate of approval [COMAR 13A.09.09] are minimal and lacking in rigor. The non-academic safety requirements are equally basic and necessary. Yet the existing regulations, employing inappropriately sectarian language, allow a “bona fide church organization that chooses to operate a school” to submit a “church exempt registration form”. Any such exemption procedure granted to religious private schools should also be available to non-religious private schools. If lawmakers are unwilling to allow this same exemption to non-religious private schools, as is likely, then they should also be unwilling to grant this exemption exclusively to religious schools. Free exercise should apply equally to religious and non-religious citizens and institutions within the same practical limitations. Accordingly, a certificate of approval should be required for all private schools, secular and religious, that claim to provide an education in lieu of a public school education without exceptions. If some provisions in the regulations are sometimes too onerous then opt-out procedures that apply to all private schools should target those specific provisions.

Secular Maryland advocates for all youth to be educated in modern knowledge without omissions or qualifications. We consider this goal to be one of the top priorities of state government. Our collective knowledge is rooted in an international consensus of subject matter experts that is logically derived using an overall best fit with the available empirical evidence criteria. Finding empirical evidence and convincingly relating the evidence to relevant conclusions requires effort and time. The history of the pursuit of knowledge demonstrates that this epistemology is uniquely successful, there is no

other approach that reliably reaches accurate conclusions about how our universe functions. Beliefs about how the universe functions that are derived outside the aforementioned framework are not knowledge. Teaching such beliefs to children as if they are knowledge is miseducation.

There are few restrictions on what private schools can teach their students, so they may mix academics, religion, and politics tightly together. Religious schools often have an institutional self-interest to try to convince children to accept the school's dubious definition of deity. Young children are impressionable, teenagers are responsive to peer pressure, and as a result they are vulnerable to indoctrination. They may be taught that faith is one of the most important virtues, that one faith is superior to all other faiths, that they will be severely punished for disbelieving and greatly rewarded for believing, that particular beliefs about how the universe functions are requisite for morality, that competing perspectives, including the perspectives from secular academics, oppose the will of divinity and will provoke the divinity's earth shaking wrath. They may actively teach children to distrust and fear competing perspectives, including secular academics. Some schools teach children blatant falsehoods that contradict modern scientific consensus. The result is potentially harmful miseducation that undermines the targeted victim's intellectual potential and can be difficult to undo

Even those religiously affiliated private schools that are the most ecumenical, that eschew holy book inerrancy, that seek to embrace modern knowledge, gratuitously add some unsubstantiated religious content and avoid some scientific details when teaching children how the universe functions to promote their religious worldview, resulting in a subtly biased and compromised education. Schools that do not promote young or old earth creationism or intelligent design may instead promote theistic evolution. These schools may teach students that satan intervenes in our universe and associate satan with non-theism. They may misleadingly teach about Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jonah, virgin birth, resurrection, etc. as if they were historical facts. A commitment to know the facts regarding how the universe functions and to understand how to reliably distinguish between well-justified and poorly justified assertions are valuable civic virtues that government should be fostering, not undermining by abandoning its oversight role.

Unregulated private school education is unlikely to provide better educational outcomes for Maryland's children overall. At a Congressional House Education and Workforce Committee hearing on February 3, 2016 titled "Expanding Educational Opportunity

through School Choice,” Luis Huerta, Associate Professor of Education & Public Policy at Columbia University, stated that none of the independent studies of the nation’s “most lauded and long-standing voucher programs...found any statistical evidence that children who utilized vouchers performed better than children who did not and remained in public schools.” However, Huerta said there is “evidence to support that[,] compared against students who participate in voucher programs, public school students fare better academically.” GAO researchers examined voucher and tax credit programs nationwide but concentrated on the major ones in Arizona, Indiana, Ohio and Wisconsin. The GAO reported on Sept. 12, 2016 that such programs “have weaker standards for teacher preparedness than public schools” and “cherry-pick student applicants ... often discriminating against some students based on their religion or disability-related behaviors”.

Respectfully,
Mathew Goldstein
3838 Early Glow Ln
Bowie, MD