

Good afternoon Madam Chairperson and members of the committee.

My name is Ilsa Mir and I am a recent graduate from UMBC with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. The idea of pursuing law has been embedded in my memory since childhood after many spirited family discussions left me triumphant in my points of view. Thankfully, with the support of my undergraduate institution, I am in the process of applying to law schools to join the class of 2025. To prepare myself to be a competitive applicant and a successful student meant taking every opportunity to challenge myself academically. Even so, I knew that the only way to immerse myself in the course material and familiarize myself with the legal world meant adopting a hands-on approach in the form of an internship.

The summer of my freshmen year, I heard about The Washington Center, a ten week program housed in D.C, accompanied by a career development course. I could not contain my excitement. As a commuter student, an opportunity to live in the Capitol for the summer was a dream come true. With the help of their counselors, I was matched for a legal internship at Mil Mujeres Legal Services, where I would spend the summer collecting documentation for u-visa applications. I reviewed countless files of women in particular who were victims of domestic violence and seeking asylum in the United States. This experience erased any doubts that I had about a legal career. It taught me what I now hold to be true– that advocacy needs to be rooted in both compassion and research in order for our judicial system to fulfill its debt to victims– and that I want to spend my life doing this work.

Being a humanities major, I knew entering the program that the chances of securing a paid internship were slim. I was not prepared however for the full costs of my experience. I paid about three thousand dollars out of pocket for about 320 hours of unpaid work. This was after receiving about \$9500 in scholarship and \$1500 from UMBC's Internship Service fund. Prior to securing the internship stipend from UMBC, I had already declined the offer from The Washington Center, citing the inability to sustain an unpaid internship as a freshman in college. Had it not been for third-party support, I would have been deprived of an opportunity that transformed my future career aspirations. As revolutionary as the experience was, I did not have the means to continue the program the following summer. Instead, I traded in relevant experience with three on-campus jobs that would allow me to save for law school. This is the unfortunate reality for many college students, especially those pursuing humanities majors. It creates a crippling discrepancy between technical majors and non-technical majors, further exacerbating the idea that the former is more important, more worthy of recognition, and more in need of our support. All students, regardless of their major, would benefit greatly from the Maryland Internship Opportunities Program, HB0255. It would allow us to strengthen the Maryland workforce and create positive change in our students. I urge you to vote favorable for HB255.