



March 6, 2023

Honorable Delegate Ben Barnes
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building Room 121
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB912 Public Institutions of Higher Education – Faith-Based and Religious Beliefs – Academic Accommodations Policy

Dear Chair Barnes and House Appropriations Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 912 sponsored by Delegate Acevero. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. I am CAIR's Government Affairs intern in Maryland, Flematu Fofana.

For many students, religion is an essential part of their identity, and when teachers give ultimatums, students are forced to compromise on things they shouldn't have to: their religion and their education. HB912 will allow students to maintain both of these characteristics by letting students in higher education practice their religion without being penalized for their actions.

As a Muslim student who lives in a county where I am the minority, I have seen students pass out on the field during Ramadan because they were told if they didn't participate in a match they would be off the team. I have had teachers shame me for missing school during Eid and prevent me from leaving the classroom when I was on the verge of passing out while fasting. It's said that our actions have consequences, and we're old enough to take responsibility, but you take responsibility for something when you've committed a wrongdoing. Have I done something wrong for trying to peacefully practice my religion?

When a student is sick and misses an exam, 9 times out of 10 a teacher will let them make up the test the next day because they couldn't help it and life happens. The same should be said for religious accommodations as life does happen and students are not skipping school but solely exercising their 1st amendment right.

It's also important to mention that this bill is not just for Muslims, but all religious accommodations, for every religious student to have a right to not pick an identity but maintain both.

Passing HB912 is a meaningful way to show students in higher education that every part of your identity matters and that you have a right to keep that part near and dear to your heart. Therefore, we support this bill and respectfully urge your favorable vote. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Flematu Fofana
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