

March 9, 2023

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

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB912 Academic Accommodations Policy

Dear Chair Barnes and House Appropriations Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 912 sponsored by Delegate Gabriel Acevero. My name is Maheen Ibrahim and I recently graduated from Johns Hopkins University.

In my four years as an undergraduate student at Johns Hopkins, students and myself struggled to obtain equal rights as Muslim students on a college campus. In my first year, although it was interrupted by COVID-19, we were not given a full-time chaplain that could assist with interfaith activities. Our needs as a Muslim student group were not met, and consequently, students on the Muslim Students Association (MSA) board were required to step up to fill the large role of a chaplain, while also attempting to balance their studies and other extracurriculars. We still do not have a full-time chaplain and it has been difficult to provide services to the hundreds of Muslim students on campus.

As the former President of the MSA, I experienced many occurrences of lack of support for faith-based events from faculty and even the other chaplains at our institution. During Ramadan, we were given barely any support. Iftars (meals to break our fast) were given either out of the pocket of current MSA students or through the limited Student Government funding through which we could only provide two iftars a week for about 30 students. Many students went hungry and there was barely anything that was being done about it. I recall one day where we had 30 iftars and one student came in at the end, after traveling from the city, to see if we could give them an iftar. We had run out and that student returned home empty-handed. Thankfully, other MSA students pitched in to purchase a meal for the student, but cases like these are common and students deserve to have reasonable accommodations for religious observances.

We also struggle with a lack of space. We have a small room in the inter-faith center that holds about 10 people, but our daily prayers usually require accommodation for upwards of 30 people. There was a mice infestation in the past year, but no updates were given to us about the condition of the room. It has been infested with spiders, filled with dust, and disrespected by other students utilizing the building where they have walked in on women praying and mocked their recitation. The door, although recently replaced, did not have a lock and could not close, and only after weeks and weeks of advocating for a door were we able to receive a fully functional door. We have to pray our Friday prayers in the chapel, which also does not hold us all and often have

students praying in the walkways. It has been extremely difficult to find rooms and the lack of support from staff and other chaplains has made it even more difficult.

By voting in favor of the bill, you guarantee the protection of our religious freedoms as students that are given to us within the Constitution. You will help raise awareness of faith-based holidays and celebrations and ensure students are getting to class without a worry of how they will manage to eat today amid their other activities. Not only will Muslim students benefit, but also students of other backgrounds who also struggle to obtain religious services on campus.

Faith is a major part of our lives, and we would appreciate being supported as students. It will set a precedent for the years to come and establish Maryland schools as inclusive and supportive and welcoming to all.

These are the reasons why I support this bill and respectfully urge you to vote in favor of it. You would be making a difference in the lives of thousands of students across the state. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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