

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 Shahd Alhadari, I am a student at the University of Maryland Baltimore County and a cabinet member of the Muslim Student Association.

For some background about UMBC and our prayer space, before the coronavirus, there was the Interfaith Center, where every religious org had its own prayer space. But it was much more than a prayer space, it was a community where people truly felt at home. Time skip and campus reopens and the IFC is gone instead, we have the Center of Wellbeing, which has one singular room on the bottom floor, and a medical center on the top floor. This one singular room is what was given in replacement of the many different rooms in the old IFC, to be shared by the 25+ religious organizations. Well, I am a sophomore, and so sadly I was not present for the old IFC times many of my friends speak of when they reminisce on what used to be “the MSA”, so I’ll continue with my own narrative. Beginning of my freshman year was when everyone returned to campus from the two year hiatus that paused all of our lives. At the time, I was not aware of how bad our prayer situation was. But when I heard and witnessed how hard it was for students to pray the simple 5 prayers, and how the MSA was told that “we could just pray in the bathroom”, a quite disrespectful comment, I began to realize how embarrassing it was for a public institution to not even be able to provide adequate prayer space for their students. I mean its 2023, and we are standing here practically advocating for our first amendment rights. There are days where students come in between classes to pray quickly, and are hindered by the fact that the gathering space, the one room, is occupied and struggle to find a place to pray. There are days where you can find people praying behind the stairwell of the building. Or days where we as an organization have to pray in the lobby, with people talking and staring as they walk by. This is an issue that affects students of all religious backgrounds, and all across the state, and so I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of HB912.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Shahd Alhadari

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