



## MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair  
Delegate Mark S. Chang, Vice Chair  
Appropriations Committee Members  
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus  
DATE: March 7th, 2023  
RE: HB0912 Public Institutions of Higher Education –  
Faith-Based and Religious Beliefs – Academic  
Accommodations Policy

### **The MLLC supports HB0912 Public Institutions of Higher Education – Faith-Based and Religious Beliefs – Academic Accommodations Policy, 2023**

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB0912.

Although public higher education schools in Maryland acknowledge religious freedom, their academic accommodations are not comprehensive enough to allow students to sincerely practice their held faith-based or religious beliefs. For example, the University of Maryland College Park currently does not distinguish major religious holidays on the official university calendar.<sup>1</sup> Although over 5,000 students (more than 16% of the entire undergraduate population) at the university receive an excused absence for any missed work for upcoming Jewish holidays, they still need to rearrange their already-packed schedules to complete makeup work that never should have been assigned on a religious holiday in the first place.<sup>2</sup> Adding these dates would provide professors with the foresight to avoid scheduling exams or projects on certain dates, and it would ease unnecessary worries for students observing a religious holiday by eliminating the scramble to make up missed work.<sup>3</sup>

Current data tracking shows that nearly three in four Latinos in the United States (73%) agree that “faith is very important in my life.”<sup>4</sup> Faith heritage is strong in Latino households, as 58% of Latino-practicing Christians agree that they carry on “unique or special Christian religious traditions” that they learned from their family.<sup>5</sup>

While the majority of immigrants in the United States practice Christian faiths, the estimated share of new legal permanent residents who are Christian is declining and shares of green card recipients who belong to religious minorities, such as Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, are

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<sup>1</sup> Rosenberg, M. (2020, August 27). *UMD students shouldn't have to pick between classes and their religion*. The Diamondback. <https://dbknews.com/2019/09/30/umd-excused-absences-religion-inclusive/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *A snapshot of the values, Views & Faith of Hispanic Americans*. Barna Group. (2019, October 2). <https://www.barna.com/research/snapshot-hispanic-americans/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

rising, with the population of Muslims doubling between 1992 and 2012.<sup>6</sup> As these demographics settle and expand their families, there will be an increasing number of those who enroll in a Maryland public higher education institution needing comprehensive academic accommodations. This bill requires each public institution of higher education to adopt a written policy that provides reasonable academic accommodations for students to practice sincerely held faith-based or religious beliefs.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB0912.

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<sup>6</sup> Wormald, B. (2020, July 27). *The religious affiliation of U.S. immigrants: Majority Christian, rising share of other faiths*. Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/05/17/the-religious-affiliation-of-us-immigrants/>.