

March 9, 2023

Honorable Delegate Ben Barnes
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
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 Absa Fall and I appreciate you all taking the time to listen. I want to begin with invoking the First Amendment, and declaration of freedom of religion. And while I know that I am fortunate to live in a country that does not actively ban Islam, there is a lot of misunderstanding and stereotypes surrounding my religion that make it unsafe for me to truly be free.

As I seek to participate in my faith, I often run into the challenge when looking for a place to pray. If you do not know, Muslims are obligated to pray 5 times throughout the day. These prayers are done through following a series of movements that include me prostrating as a place my forehead on the ground. To someone that does not know, I can understand how witnessing this act of worship can feel foreign. But for me, and my peers in the Muslim community, it feels like the ultimate sign of love and grounds me.

Additionally, Maryland can be a dangerous place for Muslims due to Islamophobia and other hateful rhetoric that I have had the misfortune of experiencing. When I am completing my religious obligation, and in a vulnerable state, I need to know that the environment I am praying in is safe. When I attended the University of Maryland-College Park, I felt very fortunate that a musallah, or prayer room, existed for me to practice my faith with peace of mind. But I shouldn't have had to feel "fortunate," because being given religious accommodations should not be boiled down to "luck" so much as having my rights respected.

To be clear, this is not just an issue about me being able to find a space to pray. This is an issue about me being able to have my existence acknowledged and my right to religious freedom met. 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,
Absa Fall
Fmr. Student, University of Maryland College Park
absa.d.fall@gmail.com
301-312-1934