



HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

House Bill 912

Public Institutions of Higher Education – Faith-Based and Religious Beliefs – Academic Accommodations Policy

March 9, 2023

Favorable with Amendments

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share our position on House Bill 912. The 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.

The University System of Maryland (USM) is committed to providing welcoming and inclusive learning and workplace environments. Institutions that comprise the USM comply with USM policy concerning religious observance and the federal anti-discrimination policy. The USM prohibits discrimination, harassment, and retaliation on the basis of religion.

Together, these policies require institutions to develop written policies and procedures to provide accommodations to students, faculty, and staff who observe religious/spiritual holy days. In addition, the USM policy requires institutions to regularly publish information about accommodations in appropriate faculty and student media.

Consistent with Board of Regents policy, any student who is unable to attend classes on a particular day or days or at a particular time of day because of the tenets of a sincerely held religious practice or belief ***“...shall not be penalized because of observances of their religious holidays and shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable amount of time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances.”***

The Board of Regents entrusts that key university personnel and supervisors will consider religious accommodations requests by students, faculty, and staff, based on the totality of the circumstances. Additionally, it is the expectation of each USM president that faculty make available to each student who is absent from academic activities because of a sincerely held religious practice or belief an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study or work requirements which has been missed because of such absence.

The provisions in House Bill 912 would undermine the flexible nature of existing policies related to accommodations for students and set unnecessarily prescriptive requirements on faculty including requiring syllabi to include language about policies, a specified number of excused absences, and grievance procedures that already exist in student handbooks and on the institution website. House Bill 912 also requires institutions to provide a space on campus for faith-based or religious practices that could require reconstruction or renovation of existing spaces to comply. Furthermore, because the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) does not have academic facilities and their student instruction is online, the space requirements are impractical.

For these reasons, we request an amendment that reflects our existing policies and procedures and is based on federal law related to accommodations for students and strikes the requirement to provide exclusive spaces for religious observances.

Thank you for allowing the USM to share these thoughts on House Bill 912.



About the University System of Maryland

The University System of Maryland (USM)—one system made up of twelve institutions, three regional centers, and a central office—awards eight out of every ten bachelor’s degrees in the State of Maryland. The USM is governed by a Board of Regents, comprised of twenty-one members from diverse professional and personal backgrounds. The chancellor, Dr. Jay Perman, oversees and manages the operations of USM. However, each constituent institution is run by its own president who has authority over that university. Each of USM’s 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes Historically Black Colleges and Universities, comprehensive institutions, research universities, and the country’s largest public online institution.

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