

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 Yasmeeen Elkoshairi. I am a junior attending the University of Maryland and am here today to urge you to pass House Bill 912. As Muslim students, we already have to face many challenges. In light of that, one of the big challenges we face is seeking accommodations for our religious holidays and prayers. As full-time students, we already have a lot on our plate and the additional stress of asking for an excused absence for a religious holiday that is meaningful to us, our religion, and our culture, should not be a factor.

I have had professors explain that I only have one excused absence for a religious reason or holiday, which demeans the significance of our holidays and disrespects my beliefs. Voicing my concerns brought about nothing but shrugs and the repeated "that's the policy" phrase. It is incredibly mentally draining being denied our constitutional rights while struggling to balance life as a student and in my case, an athlete as well.

This struggle is not prevalent only for Muslim students, but for many other cultures and religions whose holidays have not been recognized by the school calendar. For these reasons, I strongly and respectfully urge you to pass this bill, so that the wonderfully diverse student bodies of Maryland can practice their religions freely while excelling as students. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify, and for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Yasmeeen Elkoshairi
Junior, University of Maryland College Park
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