

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 Hassan Ansari and I'm a current Senior at University of Maryland Baltimore county. To give you all an idea of how much a Bill like this means to a student like me, I'd have to provide you with some background information. When i came to umbc 4 years ago as a freshman, I was horrified of the idea of having to start over. New friends to make, a new campus to get used to, UMBC seemed to be a place that I was extremely foreign to. That was until I learned about the interfaith center. You see, back then the interfaith center was a place on campus where any member of any religious group could come together to congregate and meet other religious students as well. When I began to come to the interfaith center more often I was not only able to complete my religious duties without a worry of not knowing where to complete them, but also being able to meet an entirely new community I could feel comfortable in and even find belonging in. For me, I genuinely believe that this was the reason I was able to succeed at UMBC. I was able to really find a place on campus I could call home. Now during the pandemic, because the campus over went some changes, we lost the interfaith center as it was a portable building. However, no matter what the nature of the building was on a physical level, it gave countless students a home at umbc; it gave them a place to feel like they belonged in; it allowed them to feel like they mattered, and that they were part of a larger community on campus, which i cannot emphasize how important it was for students like me to feel that way, especially as a new college student. Without the Interfaith Center it's no secret that we Muslims on campus have been struggling, and we are not the only Faith group to feel this as well. However, if the lawmakers here today were to understand the magnitude of this bill, and the change it could bring, it would literally revolutionize and better the lives of tens of thousands of college students. It would allow them to congregate safely without the fear of harm, it would allow them to build their own respective communities and build interfaith dialogue amongst each other, and lastly, it would allow someone to feel like they simply belong; which for many students in the USM system is a feeling that they desperately need, especially if we want every student to succeed at the highest level possible.

This is my testimony on why I support this bill and respectfully urge you to vote in favor of it. Again, you would be making a difference in the lives of thousands of students across the state. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Hassan Ansari

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