



In The Name of Allah Most Gracious Most Merciful

Islamic Center of Maryland

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March 5, 2023

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Honorable Delegate Ben Barnes
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building, Room
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Letter in SUPPORT of HB912 Academic Accommodations Policy

Respected Chair Barnes and Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

On behalf of the Islamic Center of Maryland (ICM), I am writing this letter in strong support of the House Bill 912 sponsored by Delegate Gabriel Acevero.

ICM, located in Gaithersburg Airpark area, is the largest Islamic Center in the Upper Montgomery County and provides a multitude of services to a diverse and large population of the Muslims residents in and around the area. In addition to the main center on the Woodfield Road, we also operate two other locations for Friday congregational prayers, altogether serving over thousand attendees every Friday. Our strong social services programs remain open for people of all faith and followings. Our two yearly events for Eid congregational prayers attract between five to seven thousand attendees, which have also been venues for the public officials at all levels of governance to come, meet and greet, and speak to the community.

The HB912 Bill in question here is an extremely important bill not just for the Muslim college students but for students of all faiths.

It will require public institutions of higher learning in the state to develop and adopt written policies providing reasonable accommodations for students to practice their sincerely held religious beliefs. This will also allow up to three excused absences per academic semester without penalty for observing religious holidays, reasonable, alternative accommodations for exams, projects and other assignments missed on those dates, and a process for reporting non-compliance.

Working with many young adults at our Center, we can confirm that pursuing academics at universities and colleges and being able to attend to the bare minimum required observations and practices of their faith is very challenging.

Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and reason with them in ways that are best and most gracious.....Glorious Qur'an 16:125

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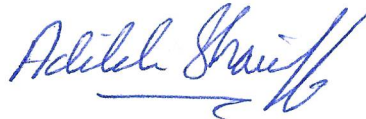
Students struggle to balance their academic responsibilities with their religious obligations, such as daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan. This has caused a sense of isolation and discrimination, which can impact both mental health and academic performance.

We are also aware of more than one instance of “denial of reasonable religious accommodations” cases for Muslim students on university and college campuses that were pretty much based on ambiguity about the institution’s policies, erroneous information and misunderstandings, and miscommunications resulting in undue stress for students that affected their academic activities and performance.

We find this bill extremely important in addressing these issues and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed academically while maintaining their sincerely held religious beliefs.

For the reasons mentioned above, we stand with the students who deserve to be able to freely practice their faith in our educational institutions. We strongly support this bill and request and urge for your support and consideration.

Sincerely,



Adileh Sharieff.

Trustee in Charge Social Services and Outreach Programs
Islamic Center of Maryland (ICM)

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