

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 Huzzaifa Muhammad.

This bill would require public institutions of higher learning in the state of Maryland to develop written policies on reasonable academic accommodations. These policies would allow students to receive up to three excused absences for religious holidays during a regular semester with alternate academic accommodations for assignments and exams. These policies would also identify spaces on campus for faith based activities.

I am graduating in a couple months from the University of Maryland College Park, the flagship school of the State of Maryland, and I feel very blessed that we have a dedicated space on our campus for the purpose of practicing and carrying out our various faith obligations, either individually or with our faith based student organization, the Muslim Students Association. However, that is not the experience of every student who attends colleges and universities.

Faith is a core part of their identity for many individuals. It's what we look to for guidance, for inner peace, and most of all, for community. However, there have been issues with religious accommodation in schools, especially in this last year. In the age of unlimited information, some professors are still in the dark about religion, its significance and importance to students, and varying practices that may require academic accommodations, which is why we are here today.

Religious freedom is one of the main values that our country was found on, and it simply makes sense to pass this bill into law so campuses will not only be required to develop policies on providing reasonable accommodations to students, but also to be able to understand the tremendous significance and role that faith has in many students' lives. The measures in this bill would be beneficial to students, but they will also be helpful to instructors in navigating different challenges that may occur when a student's academic and religious duties overlap, which would make them more experienced instructors as a result.

Maryland is a diverse state, with many different people practicing many different religions. Public institutions of higher education are intended to be places of knowledge, and growth. Only when students' spiritual and faith-based needs are understood and met by an academic

institution can students reach their full potential in the environment of knowledge and growth that surrounds them.

This is my testimony on why I support this bill and respectfully urge you to vote in favor of it. Your vote in favor of House Bill 912 would make a positive impact in the well-being of many current and future college students in the State of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Huzzaifa Muhammad
University of Maryland College Park Class of 2023
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