

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate EEE Committee, on behalf of the University of Maryland Student Councils (USMSC), I am submitting this testimony requesting a favorable report on Senate Bill 567, the Cameron Carden Act of 2024.

The USMSC holds that both mental and physical wellness are essential to the success of our students. We believe students should not be forced to choose between their financial security and their mental health when pursuing their education. Unfortunately this was the choice that Cameron Carden and his family had to make when he was a student at Salisbury University. Students on any USM campus should not have to endure what Cameron Carden experienced and institutions of higher education should prioritize the wellness of students first and foremost. We believe that Senate Bill 567 would benefit the student body by establishing a consistent withdrawal policy across the USM and ensuring that mental health, in addition to physical health, is appropriately recognized as essential to student success and well-being.

Currently, there is no legal requirement that students at USM institutions be reimbursed for extenuating circumstances that impact their well-being. We believe that Senate Bill 567 will protect our students by creating a standardized, legal policy that ensures students who endure these extenuating circumstances do not have to add to their burdens by worrying about paying for classes that they were unable to complete.

Most, if not all, USM schools have policies in place that allow for reimbursed withdrawals based on physical illness; some universities have yet to do the same for mental health concerns. Without a legal requirement like the one proposed in Senate Bill 567, there is no guarantee that the current policy would not be modified to exclude mental health and wellness as an extenuating circumstance that qualifies for reimbursement.

In summary, Senate Bill 567 protects the well-being of all students within the USM system by ensuring that they may withdraw under specifically defined extenuating circumstances. We hope that the members of this committee recognize the value of this bill to our students and we respectfully request a favorable report on this bill.