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HB912 - Institutions of Higher Education – Instructor Training – Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: FAVORABLE

I cannot stress enough how important this bill is to me, and how much I want it to pass. In the first place, I am disabled, as are all of my friends. More importantly, to support ADA instructor training isn't just about me or the people I know personally. A lack of ADA training affects millions of students every day in ways that not all of them can articulate, in ways that the people reading this testimony may never hear about directly. This bill is about doing what is morally right for the greater good.

My best friend is disabled as well and has a history of self-harm. Once, during a major crisis, a professor found them self-harming on campus. Instead of being shown compassion, my best friend was suspended. They were only allowed to come back to college if they apologized to the teacher for putting them (the professor) through that experience. My best friend never forgot the college's response. Had that professor been trained on the needs of students with mental illnesses, they could have gotten my friend somewhere safe and deescalated the crisis. Instead, my friend internalized the belief that their mental illness was a personal failing. They still struggle with that mindset today, six years later.

Even well-meaning professors can perpetuate harm out of ignorance. When I was finishing my degree, I had an accommodation to receive audio recordings of class lectures. One professor didn't send me the recordings because she didn't understand why I needed them. She also wouldn't answer my emails asking for them; I had to get my advisor and my disability support counselor involved to get her attention. Even after I reminded her about the recordings, there was still confusion around whether I had waived my right to use this accommodation at all. This professor wasn't malicious, just uninformed, but I paid the price nonetheless.

I mentioned that this bill would be for the greater good, and that means the schools and the state of Maryland, too. For one thing, discrimination and a lack of support can lead students to failing classes, which makes it disproportionately hard for disabled students to graduate. In addition, instructors who are not properly trained become advisors who are underprepared to mentor students. However, informed instructors who consciously adhere to disability rights create successful students and foster collaborative relationships with them. This benefits both parties and improves school graduation rates overall. Beyond academia, the more energy disabled students must put towards educating their instructors in federal law, the less energy and time the students will have for workforce development experiences like internships. This leaves disabled students underprepared to enter the workforce. Students with the proper support become employees with the necessary experience to keep the state moving.

For these and a plethora of other reasons, I urge the Maryland state legislature to pass HB912 and implement required ADA training. Not just for me, or for the students who have been harmed in the past, but for incoming students to succeed in the future. For all of us. Thank you.