

Thank you, Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the committee. My name is William Blake, and I am an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at UMBC. I am writing in support of HB 912, not as a representative of UMBC but as an educator, a person who struggles with a reading disability, and a father of an autistic child.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 21% of undergraduate students in 2020 reported having a disability. This percentage is substantially higher among certain demographic groups, including student veterans.¹ If you asked faculty members to estimate the percentage of their students with a disability, I imagine many would choose a figure that is much smaller than one-in-five. Why? Many disabilities, especially learning disabilities, seem invisible. I did not even realize that I had an eye condition that impacted my reading skills until I consulted the SDS office at the University of Texas at Austin, where I attended graduate school. On the first day of each semester, I make it a point to tell my students about my experience and urge them to seek out the excellent staff at UMBC's SDS office if they need help.

I strongly believe HB 912 will help SDS offices across the state by making disability issues more visible. This training has the potential to inspire faculty to advance their teaching styles and assessment strategies to better serve a diverse student body. With greater visibility, I also hope more students will seek out the accommodations and resources to which they are legally entitled.

Many other universities already require faculty to undergo disability training, including Johns Hopkins.² Enrollment pressures at American universities are only going to increase, as the number of high school graduates is expected to decline after this year.³ Leaving no student behind is more than a political mantra, it is an essential strategy to ensure the survival of higher education.

¹ <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=60>

² <https://hub.jhu.edu/announcements/2023/07/25/two-new-training-modules-for-faculty-and-staff-to-support-disability-inclusion/>

³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelnietzel/2024/12/11/as-2025s-demographic-cliff-looms-how-far-will-college-enrollment-fall/>