

Testimony In Support HB0912

Institutions of Higher Education – Instructor Training –
Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Position: Favorable

03/03/25

My name is Katie York (they/them). I am here to express my strong support for HB 0912. I have proudly worked in Maryland community colleges in various administrative roles since 2009. I have also taught continuing education courses for eight years. I am also a graduate student and a person with a non-apparent disability.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) reported that in 2022, 5.1% of undergraduate students and 2.5% of graduate students enrolled in a Maryland college registered with their institutions' disability services office as students with disabilities.¹ However, this number is likely much lower than the actual number of students with a disability. In that same report, MHEC notes that that "less than a third of students who identify in K-12 school as having a disability go on to self-identify as such in post-secondary education".¹

Additionally, the number of people with disabilities is increasing due to a variety of factors, including the impacts of long Covid.³ The Government Accountability Office reported that the number of college students with disabilities has more than doubled in the last twenty years.² While an institution's Disability Services office may be officially tasked with meeting all compliance requirements for students with disabilities, accessibility is everyone's responsibility. It's vital that all instructors know the law related to students with disabilities.

As a both a Disabled graduate student and a proud community college employee, I have witnessed first-hand both the challenges that come with navigating the higher education system for students with a disability. While Maryland's institutions are working hard to provide all legal accommodations, there is still a significant gap in faculty training regarding disability rights and academic accommodations. This is why HB0912 is so important.

Lack of knowledge creates unnecessary barriers for disabled students. I've seen how even well-intentioned and experienced instructors create burdens for their disabled students because the instructors may have had little to no training regarding federal laws related to disabilities. This shifts the burden to students with disabilities to continuously advocate for themselves and potentially educate their instructor on their rights, which is exhausting and stressful.

HB0912 is more than just another proposed training requirement. It's an opportunity to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment at Maryland colleges and universities. It sends a clear message that students with disabilities belong in higher education. Therefore, I urge you to return a favorable report.

Regards,
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1 *Students with Disabilities at Maryland Colleges and Universities*. June 2024.

<https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Documents/Research/AnnualReports/2024%20Students%20with%20Disabilities%20Report.pdf>

2 Accountability Office. (2024, August 15). *For Disability Pride Month—We Highlight Our Work on College Campus Access Issues*. Gao.gov. <https://www.gao.gov/blog/disability-pride-month-we-highlight-our-work-college-campus-access-issues>

3 Cohen J, Rodgers YVM. Long COVID Prevalence, Disability, and Accommodations: Analysis Across Demographic Groups. *J Occup Rehabil*. 2024 Jun;34(2):335-349. doi: 10.1007/s10926-024-10173-3. Epub 2024 Feb 22. PMID: 38388910; PMCID: PMC11179968.