

Hello,

I am writing to urge you to vote unfavorably on SB0847 Higher Education - Anti-hate and Anti-discrimination Policies and Workgroup (Maryland Campus Accountability and Modernization to Protect University Students Act)

This legislation would codify into law policies restricting First Amendment free speech on campuses that have been applied in biased ways across the United States in retaliation against nonviolent student activists speaking out in solidarity with Palestine. This bill will chill the vital exchange of ideas on campus.

This legislation is in line with the Trump-led repression of civil society, universities, and social justice movements and would only further the restricting of free speech and political dissent. Although the bill purports to address a range of discriminatory speech acts, its structure, tactics, and timing link it to the repressive policies that have been pushed at universities and colleges across the US in the last year in response to pro-Palestine and anti-war activism.

College is the place where, perhaps for the first time, students encounter people who disagree with us in fundamental ways. Although this can be uncomfortable, we should not encourage students to see this discomfort as a threat that needs to be addressed through government repression. The discomfort is part of the education process of confronting and wrestling with views other than our own, and mentally working out challenges to our belief systems.

The reporting requirement incentivizes campus administrators to repress speech that is perceived to be controversial, such as anti-war expressive activities.

Though seemingly benign, the requirement to allow the submission of anonymous complaints is deeply problematic. Individuals might easily abuse such anonymity to lodge baseless complaints against those with whom they have a personal or ideological conflict, without fear of repercussion. Behind the shield of anonymity, it may be impossible to know if the accuser is acting in good faith, or at the behest of an outside group with a strong political agenda. Even if ultimately cleared, those anonymously accused may still face suspicion or negative repercussions impacting their family or career.

Time/place/manner restrictions create an onerous and confusing process that discourages student activists from exercising their free speech rights and creates opportunities for students engaging in disfavored speech to be punished for minor technical violations.

Requirements that all institutions commit to involving security or law enforcement for political expression that causes (self-defined) "significant disruption" is the wrong

direction for Maryland during this time, because it increases restrictions on civil liberties right as we face more and more threats to liberty.

The requirement to involve police or campus is escalatory and prohibits using de-escalatory methods, like liaisons from the dean of students / student life office, who are often much more effective.

In recent years, pro-Palestine speech has been repressed at unprecedented rates through biased applications of hate speech and anti-discrimination laws and policies on campuses here in Maryland.

The University of Maryland has announced large budget cuts based on the Governor's budget. Cuts to the budget of Maryland's flagship academic institution shows that the FY2026 budget can not afford this \$500,000 allocation, which would mean taking money from academic programs to suppress student speech.

The Hate-Bias report central to the bill's reporting requirements and enforcement is not a comprehensive picture of the experiences of marginalized people in Maryland since discrimination and attacks on Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian communities are under-reported and under-recognized.

These kinds of mandates on university administrators incentivize overreach, pre-emptive censorship, and other harms because administrators are justifiably concerned about penalties.

Additionally, college campuses have historically been the place where the status quo is challenged and a mirror is held up to our government's policies to highlight when they are out of line with people's values and the espoused values of our country.

For these reasons I strongly urge you to vote unfavorably on this bill and protect our First Amendment rights that are in a more precarious position than ever.

Respectfully,

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