

2026 SB0208 Testimony For 2026-01-28.pdf

Uploaded by: Alan Lang

Position: FAV

Testimony For SB0208

Honorable Senators

Please enter a favorable report for SB0208.

I support exempting certain religious educational institutions accredited by accrediting bodies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education from the requirement to obtain a certificate of approval from the Maryland Higher Education Commission to operate in the State.

I believe it defeats the purpose of having our kids attend religious schools if the State is going to enforce adopting its curriculum to obtain certification. The state curriculum has many aspects that conflict with our religious beliefs.

This bill would remedy this situation, so please enter a favorable report for SB0208.

Alan Lang
45 Marys Mount Road
Harwood, Maryland 20776
Legislative District 30B
410-336-9745
Alanlang1@verizon.net
January 26, 2026

Support for SB208.pdf

Uploaded by: Caretha Crawford

Position: FAV

Dr. Caretha F. Crawford
P O Box 6718, Largo, MD 20792

January 26, 2026

VIA EMAIL

State Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chairman
Education, Energy & Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building, Room 2
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Support of SB0208 -Higher Education - Religious Educational Institutions - Certificate of Approval

Dear Chairman Feldman and Senate Committee Members:

First, thank you for your service to the Maryland public on policy and legal issues that impact us the most, especially on matters of education, energy and the environment.

I am writing in support of SB0208, a bill to permit religious institutions that received an exemption from the Maryland Higher Education Commission before January 1, 2013 when the state legislature changed the requirements for **religious exempt institutions who are accredited. The change nullified religious exemption for accredited institutions and required the institutions to seek state certification.**

As an alumni of Maple Springs Baptist Bible College & Seminary, a religious institution that initially received its Maryland state certification as a religious institution on October 20, 1989, Maple Springs has afforded me to obtain my Master of Divinity & Doctor of Ministry degrees in 1993 & 1995, respectively. I have since used my education to promote the aims and goals of Maple Springs in furtherance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I currently serve as Pastor at The Gateway to Wholeness Church Ministries, Inc. in Largo, Maryland.

Maple Springs has been the only religious institution that provides a great sectarian education at an affordable price. With the rising costs of post-secondary education and increases in the daily cost of living (food and groceries prices for example), having an affordable post-secondary option is refreshing and necessary.

Celebrating its 40th year of existence this year, Maple Springs wants to continue its great tradition by operating as originally certified by the state.

Please support SB0208 by voting favorably out of this Committee.

Sincerely,

Dr. Caretha Franks Crawford

Support for SB0208 - Ball.pdf

Uploaded by: Marquez Ball

Position: FAV

Marquez Ball
8606 Wendy St. Clinton, MD. 20735

January 26, 2025

Re: Support of SB0208 -Higher Education - Religious Educational Institutions -
Certificate of Approval

Dear Chairman Feldman and Senate Committee Members:

First, thank you for your service to the Maryland public on policy and legal issues that impact us the most, especially on matters of education, energy and the environment.

I am writing in support of SB0208, a bill to permit religious institutions that received an exemption from the Maryland Higher Education Commission before January 1, 2013 when the state legislature changed the requirements for **religious exempt institutions who are accredited. The change nullified religious exemption for accredited institutions and required the institutions to seek state certification.**

As an alumni of Maple Springs Baptist Bible College & Seminary, a religious institution that initially received its Maryland state certification as a religious institution on October 20, 1989, Maple Springs has afforded me to obtain my Bachelors degree in 2006. I have since used my education to promote the aims and goals of Maple Springs in furtherance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I currently serve as the President at Maple Springs Baptist Bible College and Seminary.

Maple Springs has been the only religious institution that provides a great sectarian education at an affordable price. With the rising costs of post-secondary education and increases in the daily cost of living (food and groceries prices for example), having an affordable post-secondary option is refreshing and necessary.

Celebrating its 40th year of existence in 2025, Maple Springs wants to continue its great tradition by operating as originally certified by the state.

Please support SB0208 by voting favorably out of this Committee.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marquez Ball,
President & C.E.O

Maple Springs Testimony

Uploaded by: Tamara Brown

Position: FAV

Tamara Davis Brown
P.O. Box 1292
Clinton, MD 20735

January 26, 2026

VIA EMAIL

State Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chairman
Education, Energy & Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building, Room 2
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Support of SB0208 -Higher Education - Religious Educational Institutions -
Certificate of Approval

Dear Chairman Feldman and Senate Committee Members:

First, thank you for your service to the Maryland public on policy and legal issues that impact us the most, especially on matters of education, energy and the environment.

I am writing in support of SB208, a bill to permit religious institutions that received an exemption from the Maryland Higher Education Commission before January 1, 2013 when the state legislature changed the requirements for **religious exempt institutions who are accredited. The change nullified religious exemption for accredited institutions and required the institutions to seek state certification.**

As Chairman of the Board of Trustees and a former student of Maple Springs Baptist Bible College & Seminary, a religious institution that initially received its Maryland state certification as a religious institution on October 20, 1989, Maple Springs has been a foundational and educational stalwart for many pastors, ministers and lay leadership in the state and District of Columbia and Virginia. What distinguishes this institution from all other so-called theological institutions is that non-sectarian courses solely Bible-based. The institution over its 40-year history remains unapologetic in its Christian worldview and instruction. It's sole mission is to further the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Maple Springs has been the only religious institution that provides a great sectarian education at an affordable price. With the rising costs of post-secondary education and increases in the daily cost of living (food and groceries prices for example), having an affordable post-secondary option is refreshing and necessary.

Celebrating its 40th year of existence this year, Maple Springs wants to continue its great tradition by operating as originally certified by the state.

Please support SB0208 by voting favorably out of this Committee.

Sincerely,

/s/ TAMARA DAVIS BROWN

2026 SB0208 UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Mathew Goldstein

Position: UNF



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January 28, 2026

SB 208 - UNF

Higher Education - Religious Educational Institutions - Certificate of Approval

Dear Chair Brian J. Feldman, Vice-Chair Cheryl C. Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

This bill exempting some religious schools from the regulations for obtaining a certificate of approval, and for requesting an exemption, is entirely counter-productive and should be rejected in committee. The existing regulations describing the academic standards that private schools are required to meet to obtain a certificate of approval [COMAR 13A.09.09] are minimal and lacking in rigor. The non-academic safety requirements are equally basic and necessary. Yet the existing regulations, employing inappropriately sectarian language, allow a “bona fide church organization that chooses to operate a school” to submit a “church exempt registration form”. Any such exemption procedure granted to religious private schools should also be available to non-religious private schools. If lawmakers are unwilling to allow this same exemption to non-religious private schools, as is likely, then they should also be unwilling to grant this exemption exclusively to religious schools. Free exercise should apply equally to religious and non-religious citizens and institutions within the same practical limitations. Accordingly, a certificate of approval should be required for all private schools, secular and religious, that claim to provide an education in lieu of a public school education without exceptions. If some provisions in the regulations are sometimes too onerous then opt-out procedures that apply to all private schools should target those specific provisions.

Secular Maryland advocates for all youth to be educated in modern knowledge without omissions or qualifications. We consider this goal to be one of the top priorities of state government. Our collective knowledge is rooted in an international consensus of subject matter experts that is logically derived using an overall best fit with the available empirical evidence criteria. Finding empirical evidence and convincingly relating the evidence to relevant conclusions requires effort and time. The history of the pursuit of knowledge demonstrates that this epistemology is uniquely successful, there is no

other approach that reliably reaches accurate conclusions about how our universe functions. Beliefs about how the universe functions that are derived outside the aforementioned framework are not knowledge. Teaching such beliefs to children as if they are knowledge is miseducation.

There are few restrictions on what private schools can teach their students, so they may mix academics, religion, and politics tightly together. Religious schools often have an institutional self-interest to try to convince children to accept the school's dubious definition of deity. Young children are impressionable, teenagers are responsive to peer pressure, and as a result they are vulnerable to indoctrination. They may be taught that faith is one of the most important virtues, that one faith is superior to all other faiths, that they will be severely punished for disbelieving and greatly rewarded for believing, that particular beliefs about how the universe functions are requisite for morality, that competing perspectives, including the perspectives from secular academics, oppose the will of divinity and will provoke the divinity's earth shaking wrath. They may actively teach children to distrust and fear competing perspectives, including secular academics. Some schools teach children blatant falsehoods that contradict modern scientific consensus. The result is potentially harmful miseducation that undermines the targeted victim's intellectual potential and can be difficult to undo

Even those religiously affiliated private schools that are the most ecumenical, that eschew holy book inerrancy, that seek to embrace modern knowledge, gratuitously add some unsubstantiated religious content and avoid some scientific details when teaching children how the universe functions to promote their religious worldview, resulting in a subtly biased and compromised education. Schools that do not promote young or old earth creationism or intelligent design may instead promote theistic evolution. These schools may teach students that satan intervenes in our universe and associate satan with non-theism. They may misleadingly teach about Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jonah, virgin birth, resurrection, etc. as if they were historical facts. A commitment to know the facts regarding how the universe functions and to understand how to reliably distinguish between well-justified and poorly justified assertions are valuable civic virtues that government should be fostering, not undermining by abandoning its oversight role.

Unregulated private school education is unlikely to provide better educational outcomes for Maryland's children overall. At a Congressional House Education and Workforce Committee hearing on February 3, 2016 titled "Expanding Educational Opportunity

through School Choice," Luis Huerta, Associate Professor of Education & Public Policy at Columbia University, stated that none of the independent studies of the nation's "most lauded and long-standing voucher programs...found any statistical evidence that children who utilized vouchers performed better than children who did not and remained in public schools." However, Huerta said there is "evidence to support that[,] compared against students who participate in voucher programs, public school students fare better academically." GAO researchers examined voucher and tax credit programs nationwide but concentrated on the major ones in Arizona, Indiana, Ohio and Wisconsin. The GAO reported on Sept. 12, 2016 that such programs "have weaker standards for teacher preparedness than public schools" and "cherry-pick student applicants ... often discriminating against some students based on their religion or disability-related behaviors".

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Respectfully,
Mathew Goldstein
3838 Early Glow Ln
Bowie, MD

SB208. MHEC. LOI.pdf

Uploaded by: Sanjay Rai

Position: INFO



January 28, 2026

The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair,
Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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Wes Moore

Lt. Governor

Aruna Miller

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Sarah Otwey, Student
Commissioner

Principal Counsel

Kimberly Smith Ward

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on Senate Bill 208 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Religious Educational Institutions – Certificate of Approval, sponsored by Senator Charles. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) submits this letter of information to outline implementation and statutory considerations related to the bill.

SB 208 does not create a fiscal impact for the agency. However, the bill would modify existing State authorization requirements for certain institutions of higher education, which has implications for Maryland's higher education regulatory framework.

Under current law, institutions operating in Maryland are generally required to obtain State authorization through a Certificate of Approval issued by MHEC prior to operating, enrolling students, or participating in federal Title IV financial aid programs. This authorization process serves as the State's mechanism for establishing institutional oversight, ensuring minimum operating standards, and providing consumer protections for students.

As drafted, SB 208 would exempt certain religious educational institutions from the requirement to obtain a Certificate of Approval if the institution holds accreditation from an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. As a result, an institution could seek accreditation and pursue eligibility for federal funding without first being subject to State authorization or ongoing State oversight.

This represents a departure from the current authorization framework, under which State approval functions as the foundational layer of oversight for all postsecondary institutions operating in Maryland, regardless of institutional mission or governance structure. The exemption created by SB 208 would establish an alternative pathway that does not include State authorization as a prerequisite.

MHEC provides this information to assist the Committee in evaluating the bill's potential regulatory effects. MHEC remains available to provide

MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

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additional technical clarification or to discuss how the bill interacts with existing State and federal authorization requirements. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Meghan Music, Executive Director of External and Legislative Relations.

Yours in Service,

Handwritten signature of Sanjay Rai in black ink, consisting of the letters 'S', 'K', and 'R' followed by a stylized flourish.

Sanjay Rai, Ph.D.
Secretary
Maryland Higher Education Commission

MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

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