

The University of Maryland Student Government Association

Testimony for HB318

Appropriations Committee, Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2020

University System of Maryland - Textbooks - Availability of Free Digital Materials (Textbook Transparency Act of 2020)

POSITION: FAVORABLE

On behalf of the University of Maryland Student Government Association and University of Maryland students, we would like to thank Delegate Stewart for introducing this bill. We would also like to thank the Appropriations Committee for allowing us the opportunity to explain how some of the measures in this bill would be highly beneficial for students at UMD and across Maryland.

The cost of attending college continues to rise with no end in sight. Ignoring the costs of tuition, housing, and basic living expenses, one of the largest expenses is the hidden cost of textbooks. The average cost of these textbooks has gone up 88% over the past decade. Depending on the course and the professor, a student may have to pay upwards of \$200 to \$400 just for a single textbook. If you have multiple courses that each require textbooks and mandatory “add-on” materials such as online subscriptions the cost can easily reach and surpass \$1,000 a semester. Due to this financial burden, which is currently unbeknownst to students until classes begin, 65% of students report that they have skipped buying or renting an assigned textbook. HB318 takes a step towards addressing this affordability issue.

Low income students are most adversely affected by the lack of information surrounding textbook and materials costs. They deserve to have access to this information instead of being blindsided by hidden costs which can jeopardize their ability to attain a quality education. Providing information on which classes use exclusively free or open source resources would allow students to make better decisions about their finances and course selection.

The Textbook Transparency Act does just that, by requiring universities to publish upon registration when courses use exclusively free or open resources. This bill would increase transparency and allow students to make educated decisions about what classes they register for. Students would also be able to better plan their finances as they would have a clearer idea of what they can expect to pay for textbooks and other materials in the coming semester. Not only does this help students when going to register for classes and planning for the next semester, it also allows professors to learn from each other about open resources that they might not have known existed. This in turn will help promote the adoption of free and open resources among professors which will help to combat the rising cost of attending college.

The policies laid out in HB318 have the potential to relieve financial barriers for college students across Maryland while improving affordability. As representatives of the University of Maryland Student Government Association, we ask you to vote yes on HB318.

Sincerely,



Ireland Lesley  
Student Body President



Samay Singh Kindra  
Director of Government Affairs