



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB318: Textbook Transparency Act of 2020

Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart
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Runaway Textbook Prices in Maryland

Textbook prices are out of control. According to the University of Maryland, prices have doubled in the last decade and now exceed \$1,000 per year, representing the top source of financial stress after tuition for college students. Since 1978, the cost of textbooks have risen 812%, outpacing both medical services and housing. Sixty-five percent of college students said they have delayed buying a textbook because it was too expensive. Students sacrifice food and spending time with their family in order to afford their course materials. Half of UMD students have avoided a class because of the required textbook list. The hardest hit are low-income students; many have dropped out of school because they cannot afford books.

The market for course materials is a textbook example of a monopoly. Three publishers control 80% of the US market, and have used their market share to drive up prices. Two of those three companies--Cengage and McGraw-Hill--are slated to merge this year, which will only make matters worse.

One reason for hope: More professors are using open educational resources (OER). OER are materials like electronic textbooks that use licenses that are far less restrictive than traditional, copyrighted textbooks. That means they can be duplicated and distributed to students, and even revised to suit the needs of a given class. Maryland has been a leader in promoting OER. In 2017, USM's Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation issued grants to faculty members who were adopting or scaling the use of OER. These free and open textbooks have increased in quality, offering students the same educational benefit at a fraction of the cost. Ninety-three percent of Maryland students reported that the OER content they used was the same or better quality than traditional textbooks.

What the Committee Should Vote Favorably

HB318 would require Maryland's public universities and community colleges to clearly highlight courses that use free or open-source course materials during class registration. Four states--California, Oregon, Texas, and Washington--have already passed similar legislation. This bill will equip Maryland's college students with easy-to-find information that assists them in navigating the high cost of textbooks while creating an incentive for the adoption of free, open-source textbooks and materials. A favorable report will represent a small, but important step toward ensuring college textbooks are affordable to all students.