

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure the budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and well-being.

Testimony before the House Ways & Means Committee being heard in SB0791: COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION - PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS - POLICIES AND REPORTS

SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

March 3, 2020 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC) is a consortium of Maryland organizations and individuals formed in 1996 to promote meaningful child welfare reform. **CPMC supports passage of SB0791: County Boards of Education - Pregnant and Parenting Students - Policies and Reports.**¹ SB0791 seeks to provide more resources to youth who are pregnant and parenting in order to help realize both their parenting and education goals, while collecting important data about the academic outcomes of these youth to better inform policies and best practices.

Youth have the same rights as adults in choosing when to form their families. Each year, approximately 800 youth from ages 15 to 17 give birth in Maryland, and roughly another 2,200 among those 18 or 19 years-old. In 2017, CPMC was in support of the successful passage of HB0616, that clarified and established excused absences of pregnant and parenting students in public schools for medical and legal reasons, allowing youth to not be mislabeled truant students or neglectful parents. Maryland was the second state in the nation to pass such a law, seeking to help identify and create effective supports to help pregnant and parenting students stay in school, on track to graduate, and headed towards economic security. HB0616 also included the rights of parenting students to miss school without penalty to seek medical care for their children.

SB0791 requires that schools provide access to more necessary resources and rights that parenting and pregnant students need to succeed. In addition to promoting further implementation of the excused absence law, the legislation calls for identifying appropriate existing school personnel to help students effectively connect with available onsite or offsite resources for childcare, transportation, and lactation supports. With guidance and assistance from the University of Maryland's Institute of Innovation and Implementation, school districts will learn how to best collect data on the educational outcomes of pregnant and parenting students, as well as the challenges they face to remain in school, resulting in a comprehensive, culminating report based upon at least three years of data. There is currently no data on the percentage of pregnant and parenting students in Maryland who complete their education.

Pregnant and parenting youth have been found to disproportionality dropout of school in comparison to their non-pregnant and non-parenting peers. Nationally, only 51% of teen mothers receive a high school diploma by age 22 compared to 89% of women who did not become parents in their teens.² Hispanic teen mothers have even lower graduation rates, where only 34% receive a high school

¹ Members in support of position include: Advocates for Children and Youth, Associated Catholic Charities, Baltimore Child Abuse Center, Child Justice, Inc., Citizens Review Board for Children, The Family Tree, Fostering Change Network, Md Chapter of American Acad. of Pediatrics, State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, and Board of Childcare.

² [Perper K, Peterson K, Manlove J. 2010. Diploma Attainment among Teen Mothers. Child Trends Research Brief. No. 2010-01.](#)

diploma, the lowest percentage of any racial group.³ Those who have lower education attainment are more likely to be unemployed, less likely to accumulate higher household wealth, and face worse health outcomes in comparison to their peers.⁴ According to the National Women’s Law Center report, “Stopping School Pushout for: Girls Who Are Pregnant or Parenting,” more than 26% of female pregnant or parenting students stated that they received little or no counseling or support.⁵ Additionally, these students are subject to a higher risk of sexual violence, bullying, and harassment than their non-pregnant or parenting peers. This ultimately harms new parenting students in preventing them from completing their education, making these students and their children more likely to struggle with housing and/or economic security, and rely on public assistance programs.⁶ Sex discrimination interfering with a pregnant or parenting student’s authentic participation in school can lead to real threats of educational attainment and financial stability for generations.⁷

Maryland youth, regardless of pregnancy or parenting status, should have full accessibility to existing resources to assist them in completing their education and be the best caregivers to their children as possible. The assistance in coordinating supports as well as collecting data, engaging in analysis, and identifying recommendations for policy reform is what these “at-promise” students - in the spirit of the Kirwan Commission – deserve.

For these reasons, the Coalition to Protect Maryland’s Children urges the House Ways & Means Committee a *favorable* report on **SB0791: County Boards of Education - Pregnant and Parenting Students - Policies and Reports.**

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Garcia, Kelli and Chaudhry, Neena. (2017). Stopping School Pushout for: Girls Who Are Pregnant or Parenting. National Women’s Law Center.

⁶ Hoffman, S. D., & Maynard, R. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Kids having kids: economic costs and social consequences of teen pregnancy* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press

⁷ National Conference of State Legislatures, *Postcard: Teen Pregnancy Affects Graduation Rates*, 2013
<http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/teen-pregnancy-affects-graduation-rates-postcard.aspx>