

Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee

Testimony Concerning SB0791 “County Boards of Education – Pregnant and Parenting Students – Policies and Reports”

March 3, 2020

Position: Support

Dear Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee Members,

I write in support of SB0791 “County Boards of Education – Pregnant and Parenting Students – Policies and Reports” that would require each county board of education to a) establish a policy to support certain goals to improve the educational outcomes of pregnant and parenting students, b) collect and track certain data, and, on or before June 1 each year, beginning in 2021, and submit the data in a certain manner to the University of Maryland Institute for Innovation and Implementation; and c) requiring the Institute to analyze the data and submit certain reports to the General Assembly on or before June 30, 2022, and June 30, 2024.

My name is Jenny Torres and I am a current NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland Policy Research intern. I was given the task of conducting informal focus groups of parenting and pregnant students and/or former students in various parts of Maryland. The intention was to inform the content of this legislation and broaden our knowledge. Due to my previous work in schools as a Social Work intern, I recognized the difficulty discussing such sensitive topics with this vulnerable population. What I didn’t expect was how willingly open these students were to share their stories. For many of them, they never had the opportunity to recount their experiences, or frankly even been asked. These students echoed each other’s challenges: unsupportive families, judgmental peers and school staff, lack of school services, and absences due to illness, lack of childcare, and shame. In our discussions, these students found validation and solidarity, recognizing the need for these discussions and thanking me for the work I’m doing. I’m sure you will all agree that the gratitude should truly be in favor of these students. Given the multitude of barriers they students face in attaining an equitable education, it is admirable how much they appreciate and value school.

Teenage pregnancy is understandably a controversial issue, but nevertheless a very significant and hidden problem in public schools. During my focus group work, I learned that the lack of investment in parenting and pregnant students had a ripple effect on the larger community. Many, if not all schools, lacked structural support for this population and thus these students either sought assistance from a school staff person they trusted, like a teacher. This informal point-person would more than likely assist other similar students, taking on additional work and responsibility which they were uncompensated for. Several student’s reported having unsupportive families, either due to personal conflicts or limited resources. So, these families too were burdened with the task of navigating complex medical, academic, and social systems whilst planning for their adolescent's pregnancy and monitoring their own family's well-being. Additionally, parenting and pregnant students abruptly face the stark uncertainty of their financial security in providing for their child. Motivated to become independent, they are self-determined to complete their secondary education, sacrificing many adolescent milestones in the process.

SB0791 is the first step in addressing the basic needs of expectant and parenting students so that they may continue their education. In providing supportive services and policies, schools proactively help these students become better prepared parents. By supporting expectant and parenting students now, the state can set a standard for educational outcomes and combat inter-generational poverty. It is for these reasons that I strongly urge this committee to vote favorably on SB0791 “County Boards of Education – Pregnant and Parenting Students – Policies and Reports”.

Respectfully Submitted,

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