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Support SB 791: County Boards of Education - Pregnant and Parenting Students - Policies and Reports

The Issue:

- Pregnant and parenting students want to be successful students, as well as attentive and responsible parents, but they face serious challenges.
- Their academic struggles, low graduation rates, and high unemployment rates, indicate that we are not doing enough to address the significant and unique obstacles they experience.
- About 1 in 4 girls in the United States gets pregnant before the age of 20. Only 51% of women who gave birth as teens have a high school diploma, as compared to 89% of women who did not give birth as teens.
- Pregnancy and parenting responsibilities significantly increase a student's risk of dropping out of school. Nationally, close to half of female school dropouts and one-third of male dropouts report that becoming a parent was a major factor in their decision to leave school.
- Each year, approximately 800 youth from ages 15-17 give birth in Maryland, and another 2,200 are 18 and 19 years old.
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics dropouts earn 75% of what high school graduates earn; two-thirds as much as those with Associates Degrees, and less than half as much as college graduates. These conditions contribute to intergenerational poverty.
- In addition, teen birth rates differ substantially by racial and ethnic group; the rates for black and Hispanic students are more than double the birth rates for their white peers, making this an equity issue.

What Does SB 791 Do?

- The purpose of SB 791 is to help pregnant and parenting students get the support they need to graduate high school, continue their education, and succeed.
- Under this bill, each county board of education is required to do several things:
 - They need to establish a policy to support the educational and parenting goals and improve the educational outcomes of pregnant and parenting students.
 - The Board needs to designate a coordinator for education of pregnant and parenting students among the existing staff.
 - Each school with a pregnant or parenting student enrolled needs to assign a private lactation space that has at least one seating space, a flat surface, and an electrical outlet.

This space cannot be a bathroom or a closet. The student must have access to a sink and a refrigerator.

- Schools may provide either on-site child care or referrals to safe, affordable, and reliable child care.
- They will incorporate a specified attendance policy for pregnant and parenting students.
- They will address any need for transportation accommodations or coordination of resources to assist pregnant and parenting students in getting to and from school.
- They will provide training to school personnel on these requirements.
- The school system will also collect and track data, and, on or before June 1 each year, beginning in 2021, submit the data to the University of Maryland Institute for Innovation and Implementation.
- The Institute will analyze the data and submit reports to the General Assembly by March 1, 2023, and March 1, 2025, as indicated in the sponsor amendment requested by the Institute.

How Does SB 791 Help?

- SB 791 requires the collection of data on parenting student educational outcomes, so that we can better understand why they are struggling, improve conditions, and monitor progress.
- SB 791 improves school policies to address pregnant and parenting teens' needs; coordinates access to services, such as childcare and transportation; and help them adjust to their new responsibilities, stay in school, and take care of their children.
- SB 791 gives these students a designated contact in the school system to help them.
- SB 791 improves policies and accommodations to allow students to nurse their babies or express milk at school, comfortably and in private, benefiting teen mothers and children.

Additional Background Information:

- The fiscal and policy note does not accurately reflect the anticipated costs associated with this bill, as written or as amended.
- The analyst incorrectly estimated that every school in Maryland (elementary, middle, and high school, so 1,400 schools) would be required to purchase a lactation "pod" like the ones at BWI airport. Given that each one would cost \$24,000, he said the potential expense was \$33.6 million, which is wrong.
- The bill as drafted does not require lactation "pods" for every school. It was not intended to require anything but assigned space in the existing buildings suitable for students to nurse or express milk, as needed.
- The analyst also said the schools would need to hire additional staff, which is also inaccurate.

Sponsor Amendments:

- In order to reduce any confusion or unintended burdens on the schools, we have drafted sponsor amendments to state that private lactation space may be existing rooms within the school. This might be a nurse's office, other office space, or a conference room.
- We also indicated that only schools with pregnant or parenting students enrolled need to designate such space.
- These amendments also include some other technical changes, including clarifying that existing staff could be designated as coordinators of pregnant and parenting education. It is not necessary to hire additional staff, multiple existing staff meet the modest requirements.
- The timeline for the study has also been modified based on input from the Institute.