

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

March 3, 2020

Position: Support

Dear Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB0791 “County Boards of Education – Pregnant and Parenting Students – Policies and Reports.

I am a former NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland Policy Research intern, and I conducted the informal focus groups of parenting students and former students which informed the content of this legislation. I consider myself lucky to have shared time with those dedicated, intelligent young parents and to have witnessed how hard they work to care for their families. Despite their best efforts, the odds are stacked against young parents in the Maryland public school system, which, as the Kirwan Commission’s investigation highlighted, struggles to provide marginalized students with the support that they need. In our focus groups, parenting students expressed their confusion that despite the frequency of teen pregnancy, there was no formal school resource for them to turn to. They expressed frustration with the way they were treated once they became pregnant, saying that although they were expecting, they were still kids and still needed the help and support of adults around them.

SB0791 provides expectant and parenting students with crucial services and protective policies so that they may continue their education. By dedicating lactation spaces, transportation, school staff, and attendance policies to the population of expectant and parenting students, they will have the tools needed to stay in school – the most immediate need being securing reliable and affordable childcare. These accommodations and services will support improved educational outcomes and future career success. Students in our focus groups reported that they were motivated to work hard and be successful in order to provide for their children. By supporting expectant and parenting students now, the state has the opportunity to invest in future generations and combat inter-generational poverty. I believe that if the state is serious about improving educational outcomes for all students, it is time to start recognizing real student experiences. Teen pregnancy is a difficult reality here in Maryland, but pregnancy does not mean that students are any less deserving of a supportive school environment or the opportunity to succeed academically.

SB0791 provides the support that expectant and parenting students in Maryland public schools need to continue their education and positively impact their families for generations to come. For the reasons stated above, I strongly urge this committee to vote favorably on SB0791 “County Boards of Education – Pregnant and Parenting Students – Policies and Reports”.

Respectfully Submitted,
Nora Simmons, MSW, MPH