



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 0463 – MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION
COMMISSION – DEMOGRAPHIC DATA COLLECTION – PARENTAL STATUS**

**Statement of
Theresa Anderson, PhD*
Principal Research Associate, Urban Institute**

**before the
House Appropriations Committee of the Maryland State Legislature**

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE – BILL HEARING

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*The views expressed are my own and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

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Dear Delegate Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Theresa Anderson, and I am a principal research associate at the Urban Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy and research organization based in Washington, DC. **I am writing to express my support for H.B. 0463: Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status**, which proposes the implementation of data collection on the parental status of students at public colleges in Maryland.

Supporting parenting students is a very effective two-generation strategy, but we cannot adequately support them if we don't know who they are. My research shows that when mothers go back to school, it yields long-term benefits for their own and their children's outcomes.¹ Among mothers born between 1957 and 1964, I find that those who reenrolled in school completed more education and earned over \$2,000 more per year on average than very similar mothers who did not. In addition, their children demonstrated better educational outcomes, including being 16 percent more likely to earn a college degree. These effects are even larger when mothers complete college degrees: women who completed two- or four-year college degrees earned over \$6,700 more a year on average, and their children were 38 percent more likely to finish college and saw earnings gains in early adulthood. This points to the importance not only of opening the door to college but supporting completion to promote intergenerational mobility.

In a 2022 review, we identified that a lack of data on student parents' characteristics, outcomes, and opportunities is one of the primary issues preventing colleges and related systems from supporting parents' college success.² National data tell us that parents are a significant share of postsecondary students, making up about 1 in 5 undergraduate students and 1 in 4 graduate students. But without insight into each college's parenting population, individual institutions have been unable or unwilling to provide sufficient supports. For example, because they do not know how many students have children or how old those children are, colleges tend to underprovide resources such as child care, benefit navigation, and financial aid officers who specialize in packages for students with dependent children. Colleges also miss opportunities to make adjustments to campus life that could benefit parents, such as scheduling courses at times that align with the schedules of students with children in public schools and offering family-friendly student life events. With a comprehensive understanding of their parenting student populations, colleges might also be able to strengthen partnerships or forge new ones with public schools, public human service agencies, and local community-based organizations like Generation Hope, the YMCA/YWCA, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, local food and basic supply banks, and the Scouts to support parents' academic engagement and success.

This bill would propel Maryland to the forefront of the movement to support college pathways for parents. Four states—[California](#), [Illinois](#), [Oregon](#), and [Texas](#)—have passed legislation relating to counting and/or serving postsecondary parenting students in unique ways. Through our work on the [Data-to-Action Campaign for Parenting Students](#), we are working with 10 colleges and college systems in states with

¹ Theresa Anderson, "[What If Mom Went Back to School?](#)" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2022).

² Theresa Anderson and Autumn R. Green, [Roadmap for Change to Support Pregnant and Parenting Students: Putting Student-Parent Families at the Center of Recommendations for Practice, Policy, Research, and Investment \(Version 1.0\)](#) (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2022).

student-parent data collection legislation as they implement new data collection and support efforts for parenting students. We have noted some characteristics of legislation that leads to collecting high-quality data and promoting data usage to support parenting students:

- **Mandate periodic data collection at the student-record level.** Collecting data multiple times over a student's academic career allows parenting status, which can change, to be associated with the student's other characteristics, academic trajectory, and outcomes. This allows for targeted support.
- **Give the state coordinating body the authority to determine the final question wording.** This allows for the wording to evolve without a new legislative process. In a review of 21 efforts to collect data on parenting students, we noted that every single one used different definitions and wording.³ The most correct way of identifying this population has not yet been set, and best practices may evolve.⁴
- **Ensure data are collected from all students in a consistent way across colleges.** Consistency means students are asked the question at the same time in their academic career, at the same frequency (e.g., every term or annually), through the same mechanism (e.g., as part of course registration), and using the same language. Without a guarantee of this consistency, data could be of poor quality and could be misleading. It may be useful for legislation or regulations to specify which students should be covered by the data collection; when, how, and how often they should be asked; and which demographic subgroups colleges should be able to examine by parental status. For example, student groups that are sometimes missed in data collection efforts include part-time students, students enrolled in noncredit programs, and graduate students.
- **Create accountability for each reporting institution.** Enacted in 2021, Oregon's legislation asks not only for an annual report to the legislature with a summary of the findings but also a report on "the progress public post-secondary institutions of education in this state have made toward implementing the requirements."⁵ The Illinois Community College Board reports the institution-level data on a [public website](#). These strategies create stronger accountability mechanisms at the individual college level.
- **Tie data collection to other supports and services.** As part of its 2023 student-parent data collection legislation, Texas established a "liaison officer" position "for current or incoming students at the institution who are the parent or guardian of a child younger than 18 years of age."⁶ That legislation further specifies that "the liaison officer shall provide to the students information regarding support services and other resources available to the students at the institution." The student-parent data collection and liaison officer legislation was passed in

³ Nathan Sick, Theresa Anderson, Autumn R. Green, Afia Adu-Gyamfi, and Mary Ann DeMario, "[Considerations for Postsecondary Data on Student Parenting Status: With Recommendations for the Field](#)" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2023).

⁴ The wording proposed in H.B. 0463 is based on [regulations](#) established by the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission after a scan of the field and stakeholder engagement across the state.

⁵ [Oregon S.B. 564](#) (2021).

⁶ [Texas Ed. Code § 51.987 \(S.B. 597 / H.B. 1361\)](#).

conjunction with two other pieces of state legislation that specifically prohibited pregnancy discrimination and guaranteed priority course registration for parenting students.⁷ California also established priority registration for parents. Priority registration allows student parents to work around child care schedules when choosing courses. California further set the expectation that each college “host on its internet website, as provided, a student parent internet web page that includes information on all on- and off-campus student parent services and resources.”⁸

- **Impose reasonable timelines.** It is important that legislation accounts for the technical system changes that need to happen at the state level and within each college to accommodate a new data element in routine tracking and reporting. Unreasonable timelines can lead to frustration, low-quality data, and half-measures that are meant to be temporary but become permanent.

In other related research, we are close to publishing an analysis of the financial return-on-investment of supporting parenting students. The bottom line of this forthcoming report is that supporting parents to enter and complete college pays off for state taxpayers and the broader economy. Supporting parenting students not only through data collection but through other tangible programming and financial or child care assistance not only supports families actively pursuing intergenerational mobility, it also makes good economic sense for states. Passing a bill requiring colleges to identify their student parents would be a good first step toward improving education and economic outcomes for current and future generations of Marylanders.

⁷ [Texas Ed. Code. § 51.982 \(S.B. 412\); Texas Ed. Code § 51.983 \(S.B. 459\).](#)

⁸ [California A.B. 2881 \(2022\).](#)