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Delegate Ben Barnes  
Appropriations Committee  
Maryland State Legislature  
House Office Building  
Room 121  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: Testimony In Support of House Bill 0463 - Maryland Higher Education Commission –  
Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status

Dear Delegate Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

As a current student parent, member of Generation Hope's Student Parent Advocacy Alliance, and Montgomery County resident, I am writing to express my strong **support for HB 0463 Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status**, which proposes the implementation of data collection on the parental status of college students in Maryland. I began my higher education journey prior to becoming a mother, and am currently finishing my second year of college since having my daughter. Having experienced higher education from both lenses, my perspective on this matter is unique. In my experience as a student parent and interactions with other parenting college students, I have seen additional barriers to our academic success and professional development. I was shocked to learn about student parent statistics through my personal research and work with Generation Hope. Across the United States, 1 in 5 undergraduate students and 1 in 3 graduate students are student parents.

Since beginning my studies at Montgomery College, I have encountered numerous student parents in my online classes. In fact, some of my classes were predominantly taken by student parents. I am grateful that my institution collects parental status data. Through the launch of their ASCEND Parent Initiative Taskforce and acceptance into the Inaugural Generation Hope FamilyU Cohort, Montgomery College has proven to be dedicated to supporting and amplifying

the voices of student parents as they navigate higher education and beyond. It is my sincere hope that student parents across Maryland have the opportunity to feel seen and heard through efforts to systematically identify parental status, advance initiatives, and approach policies. In my time at Montgomery College, I have noticed striking differences in the flexibility of their programming. For nearly two years, I have been studying remotely through distance learning, which has allowed me to stay home with my two-year-old daughter as the primary caregiver. Many programs are offered completely online, and numerous courses are listed as “z-courses”, which eliminates the need for students to purchase textbooks and other materials for class. Montgomery College proves that higher education institutions have the ability to accommodate tight schedules, like those of parenting students. As I look into transfer institutions, I fear that my student schedule may become more of a burden on my parental duties, or vice versa. I currently study part-time, including during the Summer and Winter Sessions. This allows me to make my child my number one priority without sacrificing my educational progress and academic success. According to national data, it is gathered that over 70,000 part- and full-time college students in Maryland are student parents. Considering the number of student parents in college, it is my firm belief that higher education institutions should be more welcoming of those with children. Without comprehensive parental status data collection, higher education institutions lack the incentive to accommodate student parents by adjusting programs, facilitating policies, or providing and sharing resources.

The implementation and improvement of data collection is a crucial initiative to ensure the proper representation and inclusion of a significant, yet overlooked population within the student body. Collecting comprehensive data about student parents’ experiences is the first step for policymakers and institutional leaders to understand and dismantle the barriers impeding their success.

An action taken to support parenting students is a step toward racial and social justice. Student parents are more likely to be people of color and live at or below the poverty line than their non-parenting classmates. Many of the challenges faced by student parents are due to numerous interconnected experiences and identities that, together, have impacted their unique paths to higher education. Supporting student parent success will help the state of Maryland reach its goals by improving graduation rates for Pell-eligible students and students of color. A report released by Maryland Higher Education Commission in September 2023 denotes that few higher education institutions are currently collecting this data, and most of those that do so, often do not have a comprehensive illustration of this information. This legislation will allow Maryland policymakers and institutional leaders to use this data to accurately capture the number of student parents and understand the obstacles hindering their success, thus empowering policymakers from every level to support positive change. Therefore, the

commission strongly recommends thorough and comprehensive data collection in order to fully understand and eventually address the unique challenges and needs of this underestimated community. Student parents deserve to be recognized through understanding and holistic support in order to have an equitable opportunity to succeed in higher education and beyond.

**I urge the Appropriations Committee to support HB 0463** so that Maryland can continue to be a leader in higher education. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Tamara Sahin