

February 27, 2024

The Honorable Barnes
Chair, Appropriations Committee
Maryland House of Delegates

Re: Support for House Bill 463 - Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status

Dear Chair Barnes and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Greater Washington Partnership (the Partnership), I am writing to express our support for HB 463, which would allow for the collection of data on the parental status of college students in Maryland, an essential first step to improving completion rates for students who are balancing caregiving responsibilities while pursuing higher education.

The Partnership is a nonprofit alliance of nearly 50 leading corporate, university, and nonprofit employers in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia committed to championing the region's growth and vitality. Our member organizations represent more than 300,000 employees, and together we leverage our collective resources to identify shared challenges and offer solutions to the region's critical workforce, transportation, and economic development challenges. The Partnership's Skills and Talent Initiative works with the region's educators and employers to strengthen talent pipelines and ensure learners have access to training and jobs that lead to economic mobility. HB 463 is aligned with our goal of fostering a diverse and skilled talent pipeline needed for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

Nationwide, an estimated 1 in 5 undergraduate students and 1 in 3 graduate students are parenting while enrolled in school. Student parents are more likely to be students of color and live at or below the poverty line than their non-parenting peers. Addressing the special needs of student parents improves retention and graduation rates, particularly for Pell-eligible students and students of color.

First, however, we must identify this population. A report released by Maryland Higher Education Commission in September 2023 indicates that few colleges are collecting data on student parents. Without comprehensive data collection on this subset of students, policymakers and institutional leaders are at a disadvantage as they work to understand student parents' experiences and dismantle the barriers impeding their academic and professional success.

HB 0463 would allow State and institutional policymakers and leaders to access data that more accurately captures the number of parenting students in Maryland, using similar processes already in use for collection of other demographic data. Increased awareness of student parents and the unique barriers that they face will empower policymakers at every level to make informed decisions and provide targeted support for this often-overlooked population.

For these reasons, we urge a **favorable** report on HB 0463. Thank you for your consideration and shared commitment to reducing barriers to economic mobility and opportunity, as well as making this region the best place to live, work, and build a business.

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