

January 31, 2025

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

Subject: Testimony In Support of House Bill 0298 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status

Dear Delegate Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Josia Klein, and I am a counsel at the National Women’s Law Center, which has advocated on behalf of women and girls for over fifty years. I work on our Education & Workplace Justice team, where I advocate for the needs of pregnant and parenting students to ensure they have the support necessary to complete their education. I am writing to express my strong **support for HB 0298: Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status**, which proposes implementing data collection on the parental status of college students in Maryland.

Young parents deserve the opportunity to complete their education free from bias and harassment, and in environments that are supportive of their circumstances. Yet too often, young parents are overlooked, face stigma,¹ and are required to navigate education systems that were not designed to address their unique needs.² But without comprehensive data collection on this vital student population, policymakers and institutional leaders will continue to struggle to identify and dismantle the barriers impeding their academic and professional success.³ And in fact, the 2023 Maryland Higher Education Commission Report on Advising Systems and Wrap-around Services revealed that few institutions collect comprehensive data on student parents.⁴ Without accurate information, it’s impossible to fully understand their needs or craft policies that remove the barriers that prevent student parents from completing their education – which is important to ensure they can provide for their families.

¹ See Nat’l Women’s Law Ctr., *Let Her Learn: Stopping Pushout For Girls Who are Pregnant or Parenting*, 1, (2017) <https://nwlc.org/resources/stopping-school-pushout-for-girls-who-are-pregnant-or-parenting/>

² See, e.g., The Coalition for Pregnant and Parenting Students Advocacy, *Comment Regarding Proposed Title IX Regulations*, (Sept. 12, 2022), <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PPS-advocates-comment-9.12.22.pdf>

³ Nat’l Women’s Law Ctr., *Instead of Praising Student Parents for “Overcoming Obstacles,” How About Removing Them Instead?*, (Sept. 23, 2022), <https://nwlc.org/instead-of-praising-student-parents-for-overcoming-obstacles-how-about-removing-them-instead/>

⁴ See Maryland Higher Education Commission, *Report on Advising Systems and Wrap-Around Services*, (Sept. 2023), https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Documents/Research/PolicyReports/2023%20JCR%20p_196%20Report%20on%20Advising%20Systems%20and%20Wrap-around%20Services.pdf

Better data collection is an essential first step to improving college completion rates for student parents. And there are *a lot* of student parents: more than one in five undergraduate students are parenting while in college.⁵ Women make up 70% of student parents, and 61% of those women are single parents, who frequently must balance parenthood and work responsibilities on top of typical academic demands.⁶

This is a matter of racial justice and economic justice. Each student parent is, first and foremost, an individual with a complex web of identities, needs, aspirations, and challenges. Student parents are more likely to be students of color.⁷ Across racial/ethnic identities, Black college students are the most likely to be parents: 33% of Black college students are raising children, and two in five Black women in college are mothers.⁸ Student parents are also more likely to live at or below the poverty line than their non-parenting peers. The unique challenges faced by student parents are not only due to their parental status, but also due to the many intersecting identities that impact their journeys to and through higher education.

Most student parents are enrolled in community colleges, and student parents also make up a disproportionate share of for-profit college students.⁹ This is particularly relevant here in Maryland, where there are 14 public four-year institutions; 14 private, nonprofit institutions; 16 public two-year community colleges, and two Maryland-based for-profit institutions.

This legislation will allow policymakers, administrators, and leaders to access data that more accurately captures the number of parenting students in Maryland. Better data collection at all levels – not just federal – is essential to create a complete picture of student parents’ experiences. For example, improved collection of demographic data nationally may enable states to better understand the magnitude of their student parent population, but it will yield little details about the specific needs of that population in a given state.

Data collection at the institutional level, as this bill would require, could be used to identify geographic discrepancies, urban/rural divides, or other regional differences among student parents. Surveys are a tool that can add additional layers to understanding the student-parent experience. For example, a survey could ask questions about prioritization of needs, which would help policymakers better understand how student parents interact with various support

⁵ Institute for Women’s Policy and Research, *Parents in College by the Numbers*, (April 11, 2019), https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/C481_Parents-in-College-By-the-Numbers-Aspen-Ascend-and-IWPR.pdf

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Institute for Women’s Policy and Research, *State Policy for Student Parent Success: A Landscape Scan of Policy Solutions Enacted at the State Level*, (Aug. 2023), <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Student-Parent-State-Policy-Brief-FINAL.pdf>

⁹ Institute for Women’s Policy and Research, *Parents in College by the Numbers*, (April 11, 2019), https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/C481_Parents-in-College-By-the-Numbers-Aspen-Ascend-and-IWPR.pdf

systems and safety net programs. For example, collecting this data would enable the state of Maryland to provide targeted services to directly support this student population.

This information will increase awareness of student parents and the unique barriers that they face. It will also empower policymakers at every level to make informed decisions and provide targeted support for this often-overlooked population. Student parents deserve to be recognized and supported so that they can succeed in higher education and beyond.

I urge the Appropriations Committee to support HB 0298 so that Maryland can continue to be a leader in higher education. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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