



HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

House Bill 298

Maryland Higher Education Commission - Demographic Data Collection - Parental Status

February 4, 2025

Letter of Information

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 298 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection - Parental Status. The bill requires the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to develop questions, in consultation with each public institution of higher education, to collect data on the parental status of enrolled students. It also requires an annual report to the budget committees.

The USM is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions, and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the State. Each of USM's 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

The most recent National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) data estimates there are over 3.1 million undergraduate student-parents enrolled in colleges and universities across the United States; that's nearly one in five undergraduates. Campuses have developed some supports for parenting students but do not have a full picture of the undergraduate student-parent population.

What will be critical to this enterprise is how the data is collected and how the institutions receive that information to assist students. Close collaboration will be needed to avoid violations of privacy, student alarm, and significant costs. If institutions are asked to collect this data, there will be financial costs because this information is currently not available. Either additional data collection forms and procedures will be changed or something new must be developed—and that will require changes at the campus, at MHEC, and at MLDS. Furthermore, students may be concerned as to why they are being asked about their children.

While the FAFSA asks if a student has dependents living with them, the FAFSA data is not used for non-financial aid purposes on a campus. Additional communications and permissions would have to be established for that information about dependents to be used to identify parenting students. It may be best to ask students to identify themselves voluntarily, both because of privacy issues (legal and ethical) and because students may be alarmed by being asked about their children. Also, not all students complete a FAFSA, and the FAFSA question does not distinguish dependents who may be adults and those who may be infants.

The USM appreciates the effort to understand our students better so that we may better serve them. But we encourage care and collaboration as this effort moves forward as it appears to be resource-intensive, and students could view this effort as intrusive.

The USM looks forward to working with MHEC on regulations to ensure the reporting costs and requirements do not create an unfunded mandate or the creation of additional costs.

