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January 31, 2025

Delegate Ben Barnes
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

Chairman Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

[Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#) appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony in strong support of House Bill 0298, which would require the Maryland Higher Education Commission to collect and report demographic data on the parental status of students in Maryland's higher education institutions. This critical legislation recognizes the unique experiences and needs of student parents and will enhance the state's ability to identify barriers to their success and opportunities to support their educational achievements.

Ascend is a national leader in advancing [two-generation \(2Gen\) approaches](#) that support the success of both children and their parents together. Our [Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative](#) emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing the needs of student parents, who make up a significant yet often overlooked population in higher education and workforce development programs.

According to [national data](#), more than one in five college students is a parent. In Maryland specifically, the estimated number of parenting students is 70,000. Yet across America, they frequently lack access to the targeted resources and supports needed to successfully navigate their educational journeys while balancing caregiving responsibilities.

The need for accurate data collection is underscored by the experience of one of our Parent Advisors, Michaela Martin. As a single mother, Michaela needed child care in order to attend community college. However, her campus had a 2-3 year waitlist



for child care services, despite her program lasting only two years. When she brought this issue to the college administration's attention, she was told the college would need data about how many students had children in need of care before any changes could be made. Recognizing the systemic barriers student parents face, Michaela successfully advocated for [Oregon Senate Bill 564](#), passed in 2021, which requires public postsecondary institutions in Oregon to collect and report data on the number of students with children. Her story highlights the urgent need for House Bill 0298, as data collection is a foundational step toward implementing policies that truly support student parents.

House Bill 0298 represents a crucial step toward ensuring that Maryland's higher education policies and programs reflect the realities of today's student population. By requiring institutions to collect and analyze data on parental status, policymakers and higher education leaders will gain vital insights into student parents' enrollment, persistence, and completion rates. This data will inform the development of evidence-based policies and programs designed to improve student parent outcomes, including access to affordable childcare, financial aid, and academic support services.

Moreover, accurate and comprehensive data collection aligns with the state's broader commitment to ensuring student access and success in higher education. Understanding the barriers faced by student parents—who are disproportionately women, students of color, and low-income individuals—will allow Maryland to design targeted interventions that promote educational attainment and economic mobility for these students and their families.

Ascend strongly urges the committee to support House Bill 0298 and recognize the transformative impact that data-driven policies can have on student parents and their success in higher education. We commend Chairman Barnes and the bill's sponsors for their leadership in advancing this legislation and stand ready to collaborate on efforts to ensure its effective implementation.

Thank you for your consideration, and we respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 0298. Please contact Jennifer Pocaï, Senior Program Manager, jennifer.pocai@aspensinstitute.org, if you have any questions or would like more information about our work supporting student parents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MS", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Marjorie Sims
Managing Director
Ascend at the Aspen Institute