

**Janice M. Smith
215 Heritage Court
Walkersville, MD 21793
(240) 409-3291**

February 1, 2025

Re: Testimony in Support of the State Student Parent Bill

Chairperson and esteemed members of the committee,

My name is Janice Smith, and I have written this testimony to share my journey as a student parent who, with the right support, was able to break the cycle of financial struggle through higher education. My hope is that by passing the State Student Parent Bill, we can make that same opportunity available to more parents striving to achieve a better future for themselves and their children.

I was raised in a single-parent household by a mother who battled debilitating mental illness, leaving us in a cycle of extreme financial hardship. College was never presented as an option for me after high school, as my mother was unaware of the scholarships or financial aid available, and our financial struggles required me to work from the age of 14. After graduating from high school, I went directly into the workforce, and soon after, I started a family at just 19 years old. My husband and I worked multiple low-paying jobs, and despite our efforts, we struggled to provide financial stability for our children. For the next 20 years, I worked full-time and took on additional jobs while raising my children, putting my dream of higher education on hold.

The turning point came in 2017, when I was accepted into the Parents Lead Program at Frederick Community College (FCC)—a program specifically designed to provide flexible class options for parents seeking a degree. Through this program, financial aid, and scholarships, I earned my Associate of Science in Business Administration, graduating Summa Cum Laude. This program made it possible for me, a full-time working parent, to attend college and achieve a goal I once thought impossible.

Empowered by my success, I continued my education at the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC), where I earned my Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a minor in Human Resources, again graduating Summa Cum Laude. I am now enrolled in UMGc's MBA program, maintaining a 4.0 GPA while working full-time and supporting my family.

These achievements were only possible because of flexible learning programs and financial assistance. Without them, I would have remained stuck in a cycle of working multiple jobs for low pay, unable to afford the education that would provide a path to financial stability.

The State Student Parent Bill is crucial because it acknowledges the unique barriers that parents face in pursuing higher education—the financial burden, the need for flexible class schedules, and the challenge of balancing work, school, and family responsibilities. Programs like Parents Lead at FCC provided me with a path forward, but more student parents need this kind of opportunity statewide. Without expanded financial support, too many parents will continue to be locked out of higher education, unable to break free from the cycle of low wages and limited career prospects.

Additionally, the impact of education extends beyond the student parent—it influences their children. Since I began my own educational journey, I have seen a direct positive impact on my children's academic success. My youngest daughter, who once struggled in school, rose to honor roll status and graduated from high school. Seeing me work hard to achieve my goals has inspired her to pursue her own dreams.

I have experienced firsthand how investing in student parents is an investment in families, communities, and the future workforce. Financial assistance and flexible education programs are not handouts—they are lifelines that allow hard-working parents like myself to gain the skills and degrees necessary for career advancement and financial independence.

I urge you to support the State Student Parent Bill so that more parents can have access to the financial assistance and program flexibility needed to pursue higher education. When parents succeed in college, they create a generational shift in economic stability, educational aspirations, and opportunities for their children.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to supporting student parents and creating pathways for success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J M Smith', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Janice M. Smith
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