

January 31, 2025

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
Maryland General Assembly
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Support for House Bill 298 – Maryland Higher Education Commission - Demographic Data Collection - Parental Status

Dear Chair Barnes and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

On behalf of Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU), I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 298 (HB0298), which mandates that the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) collect and report data on the parental status of students enrolled in public higher education institutions. This legislation is crucial in ensuring that student-parents receive the recognition and support necessary to complete their degrees and achieve economic stability.

Student-parents represent a significant yet often overlooked demographic within higher education. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, nearly 22% of undergraduate students in the United States are parents, and they face significantly greater financial hardships, time constraints, and institutional barriers compared to their non-parenting peers. Despite these challenges, student-parents demonstrate high levels of motivation and perseverance. However, without targeted support, they are less likely to complete their degrees. Data collection, as required by HB 298, will enable Maryland to develop evidence-based policies and programs that address their unique needs and improve retention and graduation rates.

For Latino students, this legislation is particularly impactful. Research from the National Center for Education Statistics indicates that Latino students are more likely to be first-generation college attendees and come from low-income backgrounds. Many Latino students also balance familial responsibilities, including childcare, while pursuing higher education. Collecting demographic data on parental status will provide a clearer understanding of the obstacles they face, allowing for the implementation of initiatives such as childcare assistance programs, flexible course scheduling, and financial aid tailored to student-parents.

By ensuring that institutions collect and report this critical data, HB 298 lays the groundwork for policies that foster educational equity. Student-parents, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, deserve a fair opportunity to succeed in higher education without being forced to choose between their academic and parental responsibilities.

We respectfully urge the members of the House Appropriations Committee to issue a favorable report on HB0298. Passing this legislation will strengthen Maryland's commitment to data-driven policymaking, leading to improved educational outcomes for student-parents and advancing equity within higher education.

Sincerely,

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