



January 23, 2026

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

Subject: Testimony in Support of House Bill 006 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status

Chairman Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

[Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#) appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony in strong support of House Bill 006. This bill builds on the progress made by House Bill 0840, the Pregnant and Parenting Student Support Act, by strengthening implementation and accountability across Maryland's public higher education system

As a national leader in [two-generation \(2Gen\) approaches](#), Ascend understands that the success of parents and children is inextricably linked. Nationally, 20% of undergraduate and 28% of graduate students are parenting. Despite these numbers, parents remain an "invisible" student population at most postsecondary institutions.

While HB 0840 set important requirements for public senior higher education institutions to develop plans supporting pregnant and parenting students, HB 006 takes the crucial next step by expanding these requirements to all public higher education institutions and requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission collect consistent data on students' parental status. Simply put, we cannot effectively support student parents if we do not know who they are. HB 006 provides the necessary framework to identify pregnant and parenting students and connect them to the supports already mandated under Maryland law.

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. Without comprehensive and uniform data collection, institutions and policymakers are limited in their ability to reach these



students, assess whether supports are working, and ensure equitable access to services such as child care, health care, housing stability, and academic accommodations

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 006, as data collection is a foundational step toward implementing policies that truly support student parents.

Passing HB 006 will ensure Maryland has the tools to support its estimated 70,000 student parents, empowering them to thrive in higher education and beyond. By addressing their unique challenges, Maryland can be a leader in fostering student success and equity in higher education. Ascend respectfully urges the Appropriations Committee to support HB 006 and take this vital step toward creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for student parents.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact Jennifer Poci, Senior Program Manager, [jennifer.pocai@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:jennifer.pocai@aspeninstitute.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