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January 23, 2025

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

Dear Delegate Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

As a former teen mom while in college, who achieved her bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees, and who ultimately became a higher education administrator leading student-parent work at an institution in Maryland, I am writing to express my fierce support for 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.

While HB 0840 established important requirements for public senior higher education institutions to adopt plans supporting pregnant and parenting students, HB 006 takes the next critical step to expand these requirements to all public higher education institutions by requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission to collect consistent data on the parental status of enrolled students. Simply put, we cannot effectively support student parents if we do not know who they are and what they need to succeed. HB 006 provides the critical structure required to systematically identify pregnant and parenting students and connect them to the supports already required under Maryland law.

Nationally, one in five undergraduate students and one in three graduate students are parenting while enrolled in college. In Maryland, student parents represent a significant but often invisible population. Without comprehensive and uniform data collection, institutions and policymakers are limited in their ability to reach these

students, assess whether supports are working, or ensure equitable access to services such as childcare, healthcare, housing stability, and academic accommodations.

The 2023 Maryland Higher Education Commission Report on Advising Systems and Wrap-around Services revealed that few institutions collect comprehensive data on student parents. Without accurate information, it's impossible to fully understand their needs or craft policies that promote their academic success and goals, as measured by enrollment, retention, completion, transfer, and employment data.

After becoming pregnant at 16 after my first semester away at college, I lost my campus housing. My priorities became full-time work, childcare, and continuing my post-secondary education at the local community college. If not for the handful of faculty and staff who supported me during my college journey, I would not have earned my degrees.

I will forever be grateful for my college business professor. After noticing that I would consistently return to class late from the break for her once-per-week evening course, she pulled me aside. She explained that she didn't want me to miss class. After I explained my situation, she encouraged me to bring my infant daughter with me to class, nurse her in the back of the classroom, and step out if she became fussy, which rarely, if ever, happened.

Her willingness to see me, acknowledge my lived experience, and support me ensured that I would excel academically, regardless of my parenting status. She gave my daughter and me one of the greatest gifts. It is why I write you as Dr. Ja'Bette Lozupone, a proud former student-parent and teen parent, higher education administrator, and business owner. House Bill 006 ensures that every parenting student at a public college in Maryland has access to the necessary resources and supports critical for their academic success.

Parenting students need to be seen, counted, heard, their outcomes measured, their contributions to society documented, and their formidable determination to provide economic mobility and prosperity for our families and communities, celebrated.

Passing HB 006 will ensure Maryland is well-positioned 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 national leader in fostering student success and equity in higher education.

I respectfully urge the Appropriations Committee to support HB 006 and take this vital step to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for student parents.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ja'Bette Lozupone