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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

Dear Delegate Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

As a Maryland community college faculty member from Frederick, I am writing to express my strong 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 by expanding these requirements to all public institutions of higher education and 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. HB 006 provides the structure needed to 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, health care, 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 success.

I am a full professor in the School of Public Service, Social Sciences, and Education at Frederick Community College, where I have taught for over 20 years. During that time, I have had the privilege of working with students from a wide variety of backgrounds who are starting their college journeys, returning to school after time away, and continuing in their studies, despite numerous life challenges. I am always incredibly impressed with the sheer resilience of our students, especially those balancing schoolwork and jobs with caregiving responsibilities. Over the years, students have shared innumerable stories about their love and hopes for their children; worried about the never-ending transportation and scheduling issues they must navigate in order to remain in college while caregiving; and brought their young children to class when childcare arrangements have fallen through. If anyone is ever searching for motivated, invested students, all they need to do is turn to the caregivers. These students are working so hard to improve their own circumstances, and the world, so that their children and other loved ones can thrive. In order to provide the kind of effective support that these caregiving students need – and deserve – we must have accurate data to help guide future policy, planning, and financial decisions.

In 2025, FCC leadership made the decision to close our campus children's center in order to repurpose the space for workforce training. The children's center, a campus fixture for 30 years, provided childcare for FCC's youngest learners – the children of FCC parents, FCC employees, and Frederick community parents. Its closure was a huge loss for our campus and our community.

HB 006 will guarantee comprehensive data collection that will, in turn, help provide a full picture of the scope and needs of parenting students. This data can then be used as part of an examination of the needs of parenting students, along with an exploration of the supports needed for these learners to have equitable opportunities for success. My personal hope is that HB 006 will ultimately lead policy makers, elected representatives, college officials, decision makers, and all of us to a true understanding of the needs of parenting students. My dream is that, as a result, a broad range of student support services will be considered a funding and moral priority. I look forward to the day when no other campuses will ever face the closing of a beloved children's center and, instead, campuses are offering in-house childcare solutions as part of an overall web of support for caregiving students as they work toward their educational goals.

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.

I respectfully urge 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 time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Bigham, Ed.D.

(While I am an employee of FCC, I am representing my own views and not the views of the college.)