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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,

My name is Dr Francesca Polito and I am the Director of Information Science at the University of Maryland, Shady Grove Campus. 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 child care, 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 was a parenting student who graduated with my PhD from Iowa State University while raising 2 young children as a single mother. I can tell you, it was rough and not an experience I wish for others to suffer needlessly without support. Going through it and looking back, I met countless women who were unable to find work, no less work that was well paid, and accommodated their parenting responsibilities. These women, like myself, were stressed, broke, and scared. Many of these women had careers before becoming mothers that were simply not flexible or sustainable for the responsibilities of parenting. What struck me and still haunts me, is the situational paralysis these women fall victim to, stuck in an unnecessary cycle of struggle, fear, and exhaustion, both emotional and physical, because they lack the much needed support to upskill, reskill into high pay careers that offer greater flexibility and sustainability.

The benefits of supporting parents in education extends to include children and the local economy. By breaking the cycle of financial dependence and promoting social stability, parents can demonstrate to their children the importance of economic independence and educational fortitude. This creates a self-sustaining cycle where children, raised in a household of professional modeling and financial security, are better equipped to pursue high-value opportunities that set the entire family on a path toward greater financial strength and long-term economic sustainability.

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.

NOTE: My testimony does not represent the opinion or viewpoint of University of Maryland or their leadership, and my testimony is provided as a member of the public based on personal expertise or interest.

Sincerely,
Dr Francesca Polito