



January 23, 2026

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 Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

As Director of the Pregnant Scholar Initiative, the nation's legal resource center on the rights of pregnant and parenting students, I am writing to express my support for House Bill 006 and offer information on how the bill may be improved to better serve students in higher education.

Support for data collection

My organization provides technical assistance to higher education institutions nationwide, equipping administrators with the tools they need to recruit, retain, and graduate pregnant and parenting students. In my more than a decade of experience, a persistent problem exists; institutions cannot serve students if they do not know who they are. Moreover, not tracking student parents and their needs causes institutions to operate inefficiently—employing strategies that don't work, wasting precious state resources in the process.

HB 006 would address this issue by requiring institutions to include parental status in demographic collection. It would also require institutions to track key details such as the age of the student's child(ren); these details are essential to assist institutions of higher education in their efforts to retain students and meet their needs. For example, understanding the ages of students' children enables institutions, state/local agencies, and community organizations to better assess childcare needs and tailor any services provided to the actual demand. By counting parenting students, we can more effectively allocate resources to support them—and evaluate whether those resources are having the desired effect.

Currently, the National Center for Education Statistics within the U.S. Department of Education collects some data on the student parent population. This data was already insufficient to meet the needs of states and educational institutions; now, with the dismantling of the



Department of Education, we anticipate new problems with data availability and reliability.¹ As such, it is critical for states to step in to collect this essential data so that they have the high-quality information they need to secure their economic future.

Supporting pregnant and parenting students—first, by counting them—is a small but worthwhile investment in student success. Student parents make up 1 in 5 undergraduate students and 1 in 4 graduates.² While these students’ academic achievement is on par (if not higher) than that of their childless peers, they are also far less likely to graduate on time.³ Yet when they do have the support they need to achieve their educational goals it brings far-reaching benefits; parents earn more income, and their children are more likely to reach their own educational goals.⁴

Amendments are needed to section on institutional plans

While I applaud the legislature’s adoption of a requirement for educational institutions to establish plans to support pregnant and parenting students, before extending this requirement to more schools, amendments are needed to ensure the provision brings no harm. As written, HB 006 would require additional institutions of higher education in Maryland to adopt a plan that includes referring students to off-campus resources for adoption services and healthcare. While increasing access to health and family support is a laudable goal, encouraging college staff to engage with students regarding these extremely sensitive and complex issues carries grave risk.

Pregnant students have sought help from our Pregnant Scholar helpline after being encouraged by university officials to terminate their pregnancies. Similarly, students have requested our help after being pressured to *not* have an abortion. Relatedly, in 2025, reporting brought to light

¹ Kathryn Palmer, Gutted NCEs Releases First Batch of Higher Ed Data, Inside Higher Ed (September 25, 2025), available at: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/research/2025/09/25/gutted-nces-releases-first-batch-higher-ed-data>.

² Theresa Anderson, et al. *Who Are Undergraduates with Dependent Children? An Updated Overview of Student-Parent Characteristics Using 2020 Data*. Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative, (2024) available at: <https://studentparentaction.org/resources/who-are-undergraduates-with-dependent-children-2020>.

³ See, e.g., New Data Insights on Student Parents from a Multi-Organization Collaborative Effort, Institute for Women’s Policy Research, <https://iwpr.org/new-data-insights-on-student-parents-from-a-multi-organization-collaborative-effort/#:~:text=Student%20parents%20are%20highly%20motivated,peers'%20average%20GPA%20of%203.15>.

⁴ Theresa Anderson, “What If Mom Went Back to School?” Urban Institute, (2022) available at: <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/what-if-mom-went-back-school>.



that university staff tasked with supporting pregnant students may have been coercing the students into putting their babies up for adoption.⁵

Encouraging campus officials to engage with students' reproductive health and family decisions invites discrimination and harassment in violation of Title IX and state law. What's more, providing referrals to off campus healthcare engenders even more liability; will the services be vetted? Are they safe? Do they pressure young people into terminating their pregnancies, or the inverse? For these reasons, I encourage you to strike subsection (c)(2)(ii) and (iv) requiring institutions to make referrals to off campus healthcare and adoption providers.

Passing HB 006 will ensure Maryland has the tools to support its thousands of student parents, empowering them to thrive in higher education and beyond. I respectfully urge the Committee to support HB 006, with amendments.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Lee, J.D.

Co-Founder and Director, Pregnant Scholar
Co-Director, WorkLife Law

About the Pregnant Scholar

WorkLife Law's [Pregnant Scholar Initiative](#) is the nation's legal resource center on the rights of pregnant and parenting students in postsecondary education and is based at the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco. The Pregnant Scholar works with postsecondary institutions to help them understand their legal obligations to accommodate and not discriminate against pregnant and parenting students, as required by Title IX and various state laws. We also provide direct services to student parents and pregnant students who have questions about their legal rights.

⁵ Whitney Evans, 'Liberty Lost' podcast alleges program coerced pregnant teens into adoption, Virginia Public Media News (August 12, 2025) available at: <https://www.vpm.org/news/2025-08-12/liberty-lost-tj-raphael-maternity-home-family-life-services-adoption>.