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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 Britt Spears-Rhymes. I am a higher education professional, critical scholar, and student parent advocate currently working at a national nonprofit that supports student parents. I am also a Maryland resident, a parent of two children, and someone whose personal and professional life is deeply connected to the intent 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.

I am here today in strong support of HB 006.

My connection to this bill began long before my professional career. As an undergraduate at a public HBCU, I unknowingly served as a student parent advocate while helping my fellow college students to coordinate what I now know is a childcare co-op to support my classmates and friends who were student parents in college. At the time, I didn't have the language or data to name what I was seeing—students juggling coursework, parenting responsibilities, and financial strain with little to no institutional support.

That reality became even more personal through my husband, who became a father while he was an undergraduate at an HBCU. Each weekend, he traveled home to parent, returning to

campus with no formal accountability, accommodations, or recognition from the institution. He persisted despite the system, not because of it.

Later, we both became student parents while enrolled in graduate school. Navigating coursework, caregiving, and employment simultaneously made it clear just how invisible student parents often are within higher education systems—especially at advanced levels where support is assumed, but rarely structured.

Now, as a former Maryland state employee in higher education and a national advocate for student parents, I see clearly what I could not then: the absence of data is not neutral—it is harmful.

Nationally, one in five college students is a parent, yet student parents are ten times less likely to graduate, despite often earning higher GPAs than their non-parenting peers. More than half leave college without a degree. These outcomes are not about motivation or ability; they are about systems that fail to see and support this population.

In a state as racially and ethnically diverse as Maryland, we can be certain student parents—especially Black and Latinx student parents—are present across our campuses. What we cannot currently do is accurately count them, understand their needs, or design policies that support their success.

HB 006 gives Maryland the opportunity to change that. By collecting data on student parents, this bill lays the foundation for informed decision-making, equitable resource allocation, and family-friendly policies that strengthen our institutions and our workforce.

I respectfully urge this Committee to pass HB 006—not only for today's student parents, but for the future of higher education in Maryland, including my own children, who may one day attend college in this state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Britt M. Spears-Rhymes