

Crystal Porter

1192 Players Circle

Frederick, Maryland 21701

Crystal.Porter@gmail.com

202-421-1255

January 25, 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 Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

As a student and parent from Frederick, Maryland, I am writing to express my staunch 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.

Education has been the stabilizing force that allowed me to leave prolonged domestic abuse and rebuild my life. During the most dangerous periods, my plan to pursue a degree in nursing provided structure, continuity, and a future-oriented path when instability and isolation were otherwise overwhelming. Education functioned as a safety plan.

After leaving my abuser, remaining enrolled was essential for immediate safety, mental health, and parenting capacity. Institutional support at my college, including the Wellness Center and student-parent success initiatives, made that possible. These programs did not reduce expectations; they allowed persistence during periods of acute disruption.

The benefits of this support extend directly to my children. Research consistently shows that maternal well-being is a strong predictor of child outcomes, including emotional regulation and educational attainment. When student parents are forced out of education during crisis periods, the downstream costs are absorbed by children and, ultimately, by public systems. When parents receive support, children experience greater stability and see higher education modeled as attainable and expected.

HB 006 represents a pragmatic public investment. Supporting student parents during periods of vulnerability reduces reliance on crisis services while strengthening Maryland's future workforce. In my case, it has enabled continued progress toward a nursing license in a state facing persistent healthcare staffing shortages.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass HB 006 and support policies that allow student parents to remain enrolled, progress toward licensure, and raise children in stable, forward-moving households.

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.

Respectfully submitted,

Crystal Porter