



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

January 27, 2021

House Bill 359

Maryland Longitudinal Data System – Student Data – Pregnant and Parenting Students

House Ways and Means Committee

Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the public policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch)dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

House Bill 359 would include data regarding how many students are or have been pregnant or parenting in the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center. The Center would then collect, aggregate, report and analyze this data while preserving the privacy of the students.

The Maryland Catholic Conference supports HB 359 because it will record data reflecting the needs of student mothers and fathers to continue their education. Many pregnant and parenting students experience discrimination, lag behind their peers in educational achievement or drop out of school. Educational achievement affects the lifetime income of teen mothers: two-thirds of families started by teens are poor, and nearly one in four will depend on welfare within three years of a child's birth. (*Teen Pregnancy Rates Affects Graduation Rates. National Council on State Legislatures, 2013.*)

Research has also demonstrated a strong link between parents' educational level and children's well-being: Children with more educated parents tend to have better cognitive skills and higher academic achievement than children with less educated parents (*Pew Research Center 2013*). Given the importance of education for pregnant and parenting teens, it is surprising that so little is known about what it takes to encourage, prepare, and support these adolescents.

Too often a student mother or father is forced to choose between their child and their dreams for educational attainment. Collecting good data on pregnant and parent students in high school will help Maryland and the General Assembly learn more about what the unique challenges of these students and what it takes to encourage, prepare, and support these adolescents.

It is for these reasons that the Conference asks for a favorable report of **House Bill 359**. Thank you for your consideration.