



[www.marylandwomen.org](http://www.marylandwomen.org)

# Maryland Commission for Women

A Commission of the Maryland Department of Human Services

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January 26, 2021

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The Honorable Anne R. Kaiser, Chair  
The Honorable Alonzo T. Washington, Vice Chair  
House Ways and Means Committee  
Room 131  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB 359 – Smart Start Data Marker

Dear Delegates Kaiser and Washington and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

In 2017, approximately 750 youth age 17 and under gave birth in Maryland, with an additional 1,952 births for individuals between 18-19 years of age. While the national teen birthrate as of 2017 has fallen to 18.8 per 1000 women between ages 15-19, 11 counties in Maryland surpass the national average. In all Maryland counties, except Allegany, Hispanic or Black women ages 15-19 make up the greatest proportion of teen mothers.

Nationally, close to half of female dropouts and one-third of male dropouts say that becoming a parent was a factor in their decision to leave school. The inability to complete one's education can trigger economic instability, which can continue to the next generation. Nearly two-thirds of families formed by teen mothers live in poverty, with nearly one in four enrolling in welfare benefits after the birth of the first child. It has also been found that two-thirds of children born to minor parents earn high school diplomas as compared to 81% of their peers. Lower graduation rates affect not only the individual wellbeing of these young parents, but also negatively affect our economy as opportunities for meaningful participation in the workforce is diminished.

The Maryland Commission for Women encourages support of HB359 which seeks a 3-year study with the University of Maryland to better understand the breadth of challenges for pregnant, expectant, and parenting students by requiring school districts to collect data on their educational outcomes and barriers to success. This bill adds data on pregnant and parenting students to the data already collected, organized, managed, disaggregated, reported on, and analyzed by the Maryland

Longitudinal Data System (MLDS) Center so there would be little to no additional cost for collecting this data.

The purpose of the data system is to facilitate and enable the exchange of student data among agencies and institutions within the State as well as generate timely and accurate information about student progress and outcomes over time, including preparation for postsecondary education and the workforce that can be used to improve the State's education system and guide decision makers at all levels.

Data to be collected about a student who has been pregnant or is a parenting student will include:

- State and national assessments
- Course-taking and completion
- Grade point average
- Remediation
- Retention
- Degree, diploma, or credential attainment
- Employment status
- Wage information
- Geographic location of employment
- Employer information

The need to support vulnerable or underserved student populations is highlighted as one of the key policy areas of the Kirwan Commission. The pregnant and parenting population must be recognized as deserving of the state's investment to uphold their federally protected Title IX rights and enjoy the same educational opportunities and rigorous curriculum as their non-parenting peers. Under Title IX, "school push-out" and other discriminatory practices based on sex (which includes pregnant, expectant, and parenting students) are prohibited. However, too many of these students experience unwelcoming, inequitable, or stigmatizing school environments or discriminatory practices in their secondary public schools.

There is little to no aggregated data regarding the educational equity and status of pregnant, expectant, and parenting youth in Maryland. It is necessary to collect such information and track the outcomes of students in order to determine if Maryland schools are providing equitable educational environments and allowing these youth to obtain educational opportunities that will lead to economic security. Although the need to support vulnerable or underserved student populations is highlighted as one of the key policy areas in the Kirwan Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education 2019 Interim Report, pregnant, expectant, and parenting students were not mentioned, and not one provision about them was included in the 2020 Blueprint for Maryland's Future education reform bill.

This data will enable legislators, elected officials and school boards to make informed decisions regarding supports and resources needed for pregnant and parenting students so that they can stay on track to graduate and realize both their educational and economic security goals. The Maryland Commission for Women urges support for HB 359.

With very best regards,

  
Yun Jung Yang, Chair  
Maryland Commission for Women