

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure the budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and well-being.

Testimony before the House Ways & Means Committee being heard in
**HB0439: INSTITUTE FOR INNOVATION AND IMPLEMENTATION – PREGNANT,
EXPECTING, AND PARENTING STUDENTS – DATA COLLECTION AND REPORT**

FEBRUARY 3, 2021

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC) is a consortium of Maryland organizations and individuals formed in 1996 to promote meaningful child welfare reform. **CPMC supports passage of HB0439: Institute for Innovation and Implementation – Pregnant, Expecting, and Parenting Students – Data Collection and Report.**¹ HB0439 establishes a partnership between school five high-priority school districts and the University of Maryland School of Social Work's Institute for Innovation and Implementation to collect, disseminate, and evaluate data about the academic outcomes of these youth to ensure that students achieve their parenting and educational goals and better inform future policies and best practices.

Youth have the same rights as adults in choosing when to form their families. Each year, approximately 800 youth from ages 15 to 17 give birth in Maryland, and roughly another 2,200 among those 18 or 19 years old. In 2017, CPMC was in support of the successful passage of HB0616, that clarified and established excused absences of pregnant and parenting students in public schools for medical and legal reasons, allowing youth to not be mislabeled truant students or neglectful parents. Maryland was the second state in the nation to pass such a law, seeking to help identify and create effective supports to help pregnant and parenting students stay in school, on track to graduate, and headed towards economic security. HB0616 also included the rights of parenting students to miss school without penalty to seek medical care for their children. CPMC now expands our support to HB0439 to prioritize the accurate monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of data collection efforts and intended policy updates to ensure that school districts are accurately tracking and supporting these youth.

HB0439 will address the high rates of teenage pregnancy in the state by working with school administrators in five high-priority areas to report and evaluate existing support systems for pregnant and parenting youth and evaluate these policies and programs over a three-year period. Based on current gaps in data collection from school districts, this bill is essential to ensuring that Maryland's youth are able to balance parenting responsibilities with a rigorous full-time curriculum. Limited data shows Maryland's public high schools reported a graduation rate of 86.6% in 2019, the lowest rate in recent years, attributing to thousands of students dropping out high school.² However, Maryland's public high schools reported that only 49 students formally withdrew during the previous academic

¹ Members in support of position include: Advocates for Children and Youth, Associated Catholic Charities, Board of Childcare, Center for Hope, Citizens Review Board for Children, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Family Tree, Md Chapter of American Acad. of Pediatrics, Md Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, and State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect.

² Maryland Report Card. 2019 Progress Report.

https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/PrintReports/2019/StateReports/English/2019MDReportCard_ENG.pdf

year for “pregnancy” or “parenting” reasons.³ Pregnant and parenting students who do not provide a reason for leaving school were categorized as “whereabouts unknown”, of which there were 4,876 students in the 2017-18 school year.⁴ This represents a large percentage of pregnant, expectant, and parenting youth who are dropping out and unreported by school districts. If not appropriately addressed, this number will continue to grow, further indicating that these vulnerable youth are not receiving the necessary supports to graduate with their cohort and achieve their parenting and education-related goals. HB0439 will utilize the expertise of principal investigators and academic researchers to evaluate professional development programs and train staff on proper methodology to ensure that the privacy of students is respected. Finally, if passed, this bill will allow these youth to be both successful parents and students, eliminating the need for the state to interfere on the basis of child neglect or abuse due to lack of support for balancing parenting responsibilities and full-time coursework. We recognize the need for these parenting youth to have adequate time to effectively bond with their children, lactation supports to feed their children, and other resources necessary in the early weeks of parenthood that will determine whether these students will return and remain in school.

This partnership with the University of Maryland School of Social Work’s Institute for Innovation and Implementation will include key tasks to ensure the accurate reporting of information and the sustainability of data collection and dissemination methodology. It will analyze current school district data for each school district including the number of students seeking diplomas or GEDs, the duration of school enrollment, truancy claims, and the existing community-based support services actively utilized by pregnant and parenting youth. The partnership will also document and evaluate professional development activities and policy changes for these youth. Finally, the Institute will provide a baseline, interim, and final report on the progress of policy changes and collection methodology, including recommendations to ensure long-term sustainability.

Maryland youth, regardless of pregnancy or parenting status, should have full accessibility to existing resources to assist them in completing their education and be the best caregivers to their children as possible.

For these reasons, the Coalition to Protect Maryland’s Children urges the House Ways & Means Committee a *favorable* report on **HB0439: Institute for Innovation and Implementation – Pregnant, Expecting, and Parenting Students – Data Collection and Report.**

³ Summary of Attendance for Maryland Public Schools 2017-2018
<http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20172018Student/2018Attendance.pdf>

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