

# 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

## **HB0359: MARYLAND LONGITUDINAL DATABASE SYSTEM - STUDENT DATA - PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS**

**JANUARY 27, 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 HB0359: Maryland Longitudinal Database System – Student Data – Pregnant and Parenting Students.**<sup>1</sup> HB0359 seeks to collect important data about the academic outcomes of these youth to better inform policies and best practices to continue supporting pregnant and parenting youth in their parenting and education goals.

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.

HB0359 will expand upon those rights by requiring the state to report on pregnant and parenting status of students in order to better assess the number of parenting youth failing to achieve their education goals, and current reporting mechanisms fail to collect data on this population. 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.<sup>2</sup> However, Maryland's public high schools reported that only 49 students formally withdrew during the previous academic year for "pregnancy" or "parenting" reasons.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> Members in support of position include: Advocates for Children and Youth, Associated Catholic Charities, Baltimore Child Abuse Center, Child Justice, Inc., 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.

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Report Card. 2019 Progress Report.

[https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/PrintReports/2019/StateReports/English/2019MDReportCard\\_ENG.pdf](https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/PrintReports/2019/StateReports/English/2019MDReportCard_ENG.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Summary of Attendance for Maryland Public Schools 2017-2018

<http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20172018Student/2018Attendance.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Summary of Attendance for Maryland Public Schools 2017-2018

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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. 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.

Pregnant and parenting youth have been found to disproportionately dropout of school in comparison to their non-pregnant and non-parenting peers. Nationally, only 51% of teen mothers receive a high school diploma by age 22 compared to 89% of women who did not become parents in their teens.<sup>5</sup> Hispanic teen mothers have even lower graduation rates, where only 34% receive a high school diploma, the lowest percentage of any racial group.<sup>6</sup> Those who have lower education attainment are more likely to be unemployed, less likely to accumulate higher household wealth, and face worse health outcomes in comparison to their peers.<sup>7</sup>

With low state graduation rate and the large percentage of high school dropouts, we are concerned that this may indicate that pregnant and parenting youth are not receiving the necessary supports to graduate with their cohort. Establishing an indicator in the Maryland Longitudinal Database System will allow school districts to specifically note pregnant and parenting status of students in order to record and track their educational outcomes. Data will be collected by school administrators and remain anonymous in the database system, ensuring the privacy of these youth in accurate data collection methods.

Maryland would not be the first state to track this data. The Wisconsin Department of Education received funding through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish an indicator for pregnant and parenting students in schools participating in their project. CDC project staff worked directly with school administrators to collect data that tracked the relationship between pregnant and parenting status and adverse health outcomes and educational fulfillment. While aggregated data was kept anonymous, information was collected via self-reporting from students in the participating school districts. A self-report methodology was utilized to ensure that students felt comfortable in reporting their pregnancy or parenting status to school administrators and ensured that the study did not violate any ethics in data collection. In this study particularly, it is important to note that information was collected on pregnancies rather than births in order to ensure that high-risk vulnerable students were identified in the earlier stages of pregnancy and subsequently able to receive the necessary support and resources.<sup>8</sup> Including pregnancies rather than limiting the data solely to births is essential for Maryland to accurately track the number of pregnant and parenting youth at risk of dropping out and ensuring that anyone in need of resources can receive them as early as possible.

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 **HB0359: Maryland Longitudinal Database System – Student Data – Pregnant and Parenting Students**.

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<sup>5</sup> [Perper K, Peterson K, Manlove J. 2010. Diploma Attainment among Teen Mothers. Child Trends Research Brief. No. 2010-01.](#)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Wisconsin Department of Instruction InSPIRE Project. <https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/school-age-parent/inspire-grant>

