

# 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 **HB0401: PUBLIC SCHOOLS-PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS - POLICIES AND REPORTS**

**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 HB0401: Public Schools - Pregnant and Parenting Students - Policies and Reports.**<sup>1</sup> HB0401 seeks to provide more resources to youth who are pregnant and parenting in order to help realize both 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.

HB0401 requires that schools provide access to more resources and rights that parenting and pregnant students need to succeed. In addition to promoting further implementation of the excused absence law, the legislation calls for identifying appropriate existing school personnel to help students effectively connect with available resources for childcare, transportation, and further establishes a designated, safe, and private lactation space within schools so mothers can continue breastfeeding their babies. Most importantly, this legislation establishes the necessary policy changes and mechanisms within school districts so young parents can access the resources they need to successfully achieve their parenting and educational goals. In turn, 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 disproportionality 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>2</sup>

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

Hispanic teen mothers have even lower graduation rates, where only 34% receive a high school diploma, the lowest percentage of any racial group.<sup>3</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>4</sup> Additionally, weakened support systems that restrict timely and exclusive breastfeeding by new mothers have adverse consequences on newborns. The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that newborns who are not exclusively breastfed are more likely to have increased morbidities such as a heightened risk of developing childhood obesity, diabetes, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).<sup>5</sup> As such, it is vital for Maryland’s youth that schools provide the support and opportunity for young mothers to breastfeed as necessary.

According to the National Women’s Law Center report, “Stopping School Pushout for: Girls Who Are Pregnant or Parenting,” more than 26% of female pregnant or parenting students stated that they received little or no counseling or support.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, these students are subject to a higher risk of sexual violence, bullying, and harassment than their non-pregnant or parenting peers. This ultimately harms new parenting students in preventing them from completing their education, making these students and their children more likely to struggle with housing and/or economic security, and rely on public assistance programs.<sup>7</sup> Sex discrimination interfering with a pregnant or parenting student’s authentic participation in school can lead to real threats of educational attainment and financial stability for generations.<sup>8</sup>

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 **HB0401: Public Schools - Pregnant and Parenting Students - Policies and Reports.**

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics “Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk” doi:10.1542/peds.2011-3552 [www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2011-3552](http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2011-3552)

<sup>6</sup> Garcia, Kelli and Chaudhry, Neena. (2017). Stopping School Pushout for: Girls Who Are Pregnant or Parenting. National Women’s Law Center.

<sup>7</sup> Hoffman, S. D., & Maynard, R. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Kids having kids: economic costs and social consequences of teen pregnancy* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press

<sup>8</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, *Postcard: Teen Pregnancy Affects Graduation Rates*, 2013 <http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/teen-pregnancy-affects-graduation-rates-postcard.aspx>