

Delegate Anne R. Kaiser, Chair

Delegate Alonzo T. Washington, Vice Chair

Ways and Means Committee

January 22, 2021

Support for HB0401 – Pregnant and Parenting Students Policies

I am a social worker with over three years of experience working with adolescences in the Maryland public school system and I strongly support HB0401, Pregnant and Parenting Student Polices. These polices will ensure parenting students receive supports to achieve their educational outcomes.

The state's average teen pregnancy rate is 14.1 per 1,000 females age 15-19<sup>1</sup>. This number increases fivefold when the scope is narrowed to the population of teenagers that I work with in South Baltimore. In this particular region of Maryland the teen pregnancy rate is 70.9 per 1,000 females age 15-19<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, the national teen parent graduation rate and the five-year graduation rate in Baltimore City Public Schools are both only around 40%<sup>3,4</sup>. Our public school system in Maryland makes dropping out of school an easy decision for over half of our pregnant and parenting students.

Children are expensive! Teenage parents first have the difficult and pricey childcare barrier to figured out. If the teen can find affordable, quality childcare, young moms and dads are then faced with a decision to either continue with school or find a job and earn money. Most of the 50+ parenting students I have encountered, attempt to do both, but less than half are able to sustain that lifestyle and end up dropping out of school. Getting to school alone, can take a parenting student over twice the time as an average student when they must use public transportation to get their child to daycare/preschool and then make their own journey to school.

The public school system can also make childcare responsibilities impossible for teen parents. Medical research tells us that breast feeding has major health benefits for infants and their mothers, however in my three years of work with parenting teenagers, I have yet to meet a teen parent who chose to breastfeed after returning to school. There is simply no space for them to safety pump and store breast milk in the school. Providing lactation spaces will allow students to prioritize both their education and their child's health.

Currently, I am working with an expectant student who is due in February. The student was just told that she will be expected to continue to complete schoolwork online as Baltimore City schools are still virtual. All parents deserve excused time off to recover, bond with their baby, and get acclimated to being a parent, no matter if they are a state employee or a high school student. However, I know that for many students a pregnancy leads to an overwhelming number of unexcused absences that make continuing with school an uphill battle. This bill would

ensure that every parenting student has an advocate in their school that will ensure the attendance and excused absence policy passed in 2017 is upheld.

I strongly encourage you to support HB0401 and allow pregnant and parenting teens the support they deserve to achieve their educational goals without sacrificing their health or financial security.

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<sup>1</sup>The Annie E Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data Center. (2018, September). Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/44-children-in-poverty-by-race-and-ethnicity#detailed/2/22/false/871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38,35/10,11,9,12,1,185,13/324,323>

<sup>2</sup>Jacob France Institute. (2018). *Baltimore City Vital Signs*. Retrieved from <https://bniajfi.org/community/Baltimore%20City/>

<sup>3</sup>Shuger, L. (2012). Teen Pregnancy and High School Dropout: What Communities are Doing to Address These Issues.

<sup>4</sup>Baltimore City Public Schools. (2019, March 15). More City Schools Students Graduate High School in Four Years [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/node/1067>