

February 27, 2024

Appropriations Committee
Maryland State Legislature
House Office Building
Room 121
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: Testimony in Support of House Bill 0463: Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status

Dear Delegate Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Salma Elakbawy, and I am a Policy Analyst at the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR). IWPR is a research institution dedicated to building evidence to shape policies that grow women’s power and influence, close inequality gaps, and improve the economic well-being of families. I am writing to express my **support for HB 0463: Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status**, which proposes the implementation of data collection on the parental status of college students in Maryland.

IWPR has an established track record of research on student parents and why policymakers must address the hurdles they encounter. IWPR’s analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019-20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study¹ shows that one in five college students are parents, meaning that over three million students are raising children while pursuing a postsecondary degree. Out of this vast student-parent population, about three-quarters (2.3 million) are mothers.

The latest available data also show that the percentage of students raising children differs across racial and ethnic groups: 35.8 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native college students, 29.7 percent of Black college students, and a similar percentage of Hispanic and White students (17.5 and 17.3 percent, respectively) are parents.

As the above-mentioned data points show, some data on student parents is available at the national level. However, IWPR encourages states to incorporate more data collection mechanisms to grasp the full picture of student-parent demographics at the state level. Data collection on student-parent demographics is an essential tool in highlighting and better addressing the needs of this population. During a recent project analyzing state policies enacted in support of student parents, our conversations with groups dedicated to serving and supporting student parents in various states also highlighted the gaps in data availability.

¹ National Postsecondary Student Aid Study - Overview.” National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a part of the U.S. Department of Education. Accessed February 22, 2024. <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/npsas/>.

Student parents are enrolled in all types of institutions. Nationally, according to IWPR research², 37 percent attend community college, compared with 22 percent who attend public four-year institutions. Eleven percent of student parents are enrolled in private nonprofit four-year institutions, and 16 percent attend private for-profit institutions. Better data collection would mean better availability of student-parent data by institution type, which would enable examining different outcomes, including college retention and completion rates for student parents.

Supporting student parents has implications for gender and racial equity. The unique challenges student parents face are not only due to their parental status but also to the many intersecting identities that impact their journeys to and through higher education. Better data collection is needed to bring visibility to and understand the full needs of this unique population.

State, national, and private data on student parents are limited, siloed, or non-existent. The lack of comprehensive data on student parents can lead institutions and policymakers to underestimate the prevalence of student parents and make their needs invisible. Data collection is important to create a complete picture of their experiences to inform better policies. IWPR's research finds that demographic data collection covering student parents can enable states to better understand the magnitude of this population and help policymakers better understand how student parents interact with various support systems and safety net programs. Student parent data collection can also help state-run programs improve how they meet the needs of student parents.

IWPR strongly recommends that states explore opportunities, including this bill, to improve data collection and research at all levels, support institutions to collect information on enrolled student parents, and identify ways to comparatively assess outcomes for this group. Demographic data on student parents is necessary to cultivate support programs on campuses for this unique population. Demographic data collection on students is the first step on the road to addressing and supporting student parents' educational trajectories.

This legislation will allow state and institutional policymakers and leaders to access data that more accurately captures the number of parenting students in Maryland. This information will increase awareness of student parents and the unique barriers they face while supporting efforts by policymakers at every level to make informed decisions and provide targeted support for this often-overlooked population. Student parents deserve to be recognized and supported to succeed in higher education and beyond.

² Nina Besser Doorley, Salma Elakbawy, and Afet Dundar. "POLICY BRIEF: STATE POLICY FOR STUDENT PARENT SUCCESS: A LANDSCAPE SCAN OF POLICY SOLUTIONS ENACTED AT THE STATE LEVEL." <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Student-Parent-State-Policy-Brief-FINAL.pdf>, August 2023. <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Student-Parent-State-Policy-Brief-FINAL.pdf>.

I urge the Appropriations Committee to support HB 0463 so that Maryland can continue to be a leader in higher education. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Salma Elakbawy