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

Subject: Informational Testimony for House Bill 0463 - Maryland Higher Education
Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status

Dear Delegate Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

As a current resident of Greenbelt in Prince George's County, Maryland, I am writing to **share information relevant to 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.

I work with student parents in my professional capacity at Bowie State University (BSU), though this testimony is in my role as a citizen of Prince George's County, not as a representative of BSU.

I am the project director for two grants to support student parents towards completing their education goals (Child Care Access Means Parents in School from U.S. Department of Education and the Black and Native Family Futures Fund from Ascend at the Aspen Institute). I would like to share some information that I have gained through working with student parents, conducting surveys and focus groups with student parents, and talking to colleagues on our campus and across the State of Maryland.

1. Student parents have unique voices, personal stories, challenges and successes. Their lived experience and contributions are valuable to the college / university community, but their voices often go unheard.
2. Financial challenges are often a significant stressor for student parents. Child care in Maryland costs more than college tuition, and student parents are often facing child care costs and college tuition costs at the same time.
3. Student parents who have required unpaid internships as part of their curriculum (such as high priority programs like teacher education, nursing and mental health counseling) have additional financial burdens from balancing their responsibilities to financially support their families and pay their educational expenses while cutting back their paid working hours in order to complete their required unpaid internship. Understanding the challenges of student parents during unpaid internships and supporting them may help increase retention and graduation rates in critical fields such as teacher education, nursing and mental health counseling.
4. Support services for student parents are not universal. Students often face a piecemeal, "case by case basis" when asking for support as a parenting student.
5. Many student parents are adult learners. If we want to increase college completion rates among adult learners, supporting student parents should be part of the discussion.
6. Student parents are an "invisible" population. To effectively assess the needs of student parents, design programs to support student parents to help them complete their educational goals, include student parents with lived experience on the design team, or or budget for support services- we need to know which of our students are also parents. We don't currently have that information.
7. Using FAFSA data is not the solution. Estimating the number of student parents using FAFSA data likely misses many student parents. There are many reasons why a student parent may not fill out a FAFSA, and rates of FAFSA completion are very different across different Maryland institutions of higher education. FAFSA data is also protected data and uses of this data are limited by law.
8. Collecting parenting status at one point in time, such as upon admission, will miss students who become a parent while they are a student. Regular data collection efforts are key to having updated parenting data.
9. Colleagues in other states use short surveys at annual or semi-annual data points for students such as changing their password or registering for courses to ask about parenting status.
10. National data indicates that student parents are more likely to be minority students and that they are much less likely to graduate than their non-parenting peers, even though

their GPA's are similar or higher. This indicates that parenting status is a retention and graduation issue as well as a social justice issue.

I am a university faculty member, but I also have experience with taking classes while working full time and caring for young children. I am a lifelong learner, and I went back to school to take classes after I had completed my Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology and was a full time faculty member at Bowie State University. While I was taking classes, I found it much harder to balance my time between caring for children, working, and school than I did when I was a "traditional" student without children.

One day between classes, I went to the new lactation room to pump breast milk as a breastfeeding mother- only to discover that there was no electrical outlet in the lactation room so I could not use my electric breast pump. I went to the dean's office and they found me a private place to pump and put in a work order to install the electrical outlet, but what happens to other students when the solutions aren't as "easy"?

While taking an online class, I had to take one of my children to the emergency room on the night that a midterm exam was due online. I emailed the professor with documentation and luckily she granted me an extension on that assignment. The online courses allowed me the flexibility to take classes after work and after my kids went to bed, but I still had to request deadline extensions on occasions where I just didn't have the time to finish my schoolwork on time and also fulfill my family, work and financial obligations.

In both of these cases, faculty and staff worked with me to accommodate my needs as a student with children. But this was on a "case by case basis"- there was no official policy or support for me as a parenting student.

In summary, student parents face unique challenges in higher education and Maryland's institutions of higher education do not currently have enough information to assess the needs and challenges of this population. Please consider this information as you consider HB 0463.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Erica Hernandez