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

Subject: Generation Hope's 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,

As a former student parent and current student parent advocate residing in Montgomery County, I am writing to express my strong support for HB 0463, the Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status bill. This legislation proposes the implementation of data collection on the parental status of college students in Maryland, a crucial step in understanding and supporting the needs of student parents like myself.

Nationwide, 1 in 5 undergraduate students and 1 in 3 graduate students are parenting while in college. However, without comprehensive data collection on this vital student population, policymakers and institutional leaders struggle to truly understand our experiences and dismantle the barriers impeding our academic and professional success.

Supporting student parents is a matter of racial and social justice. We are more likely to be students of color and live at or below the poverty line than our non-parenting peers. This was the case with myself and I often struggled to meet the basic needs of not only myself, but also my children. Without proper resources, it seemed that finishing college was not within my reach. I was fortunate enough to have the support of a mentor who was willing to take on the financial burden and family who was willing to step up and rotate child care duties, but it was unreliable and stressful to coordinate on top of my hectic schedule. The unique challenges we face are not only due to our parental status, but also due to the many intersecting identities that impact our journeys to and through higher education.

I can personally attest to the difficulties of navigating college as a student parent with intersecting identities, especially as an undocumented woman who is constantly in fear that her DACA status would be stripped. Balancing academic responsibilities with the demands of parenthood while living in constant uncertainty about my immigration status was incredibly challenging. However, I persevered because I knew, and have also experienced it first-hand, that my college degree was the key to providing a better future for my two young boys. With my degree, not only do I have access to a career and financial stability, but emotional stability knowing that I can be there for my boys as they grow.

This legislation will provide State and institutional policymakers and leaders with access to data that more accurately reflects the number of parenting students in Maryland than ever before. Based on national data, it can be assumed that more than 70,000 Marylanders are parenting while attending college part or full time. Working for an organization that provides direct services here in the D.C Metropolitan area, we know it to be true as we currently serve 96 student parents in Maryland and my own sister is also parenting while raising her son. This information will increase the awareness of not only the student parents that we work with, but also all the student parents in Maryland and it will elevate the unique barriers that we face. This critical legislation will allow policymakers to make informed decisions and provide more targeted support for this often overlooked population.

Student parents like myself deserve to be recognized and supported so that we can succeed in higher education and beyond. I am grateful for having the opportunity to complete my degree, but we don't all have a mentor, a Generation Hope in our corner or families who can help us with child care. I knew that access to child care was imperative for me to earn my degree but with the rising cost of child care and the lack of child care centers on campuses, it was difficult to see the finish line. Data collection is a critical first step to bridging the gaps and ensuring that higher education is more equitable. I urge the Appropriations Committee to support HB so that Maryland can continue to be a leader in higher education. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Yoslin Amaya Hernandez