



February 22, 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:

We write in support of HB 0463 and its stated aim of improving the data that Maryland has on parenting students in higher education.

New America’s higher education program is a team of researchers, writers, and advocates from diverse backgrounds who engage in thoughtful analysis, shedding light on the thorniest issues in higher education and developing student-centered policy recommendations. We are dedicated to making higher education more equitable and accountable, fighting for inclusion rather than exclusivity so that everyone has the chance to obtain an affordable, high-quality education after high school.

New America’s interdisciplinary team conducts research, policy analysis, and advocacy work in the student parent space. We believe that student parents should be considered, represented, and have a seat at the table for all higher education-related policy conversations—including those related to access and affordability, accountability, completion, and basic needs.

Our efforts build on New America’s expertise in federal advocacy and coalition building and leverage our ongoing work with institutions and states. Our goals include raising awareness about and elevating this population; bringing new stakeholders, organizations, and voices into the field; connecting research, data, and promising practices to the policy advocacy space; and helping to build and advance policy solutions for student parents.

We know that [one out of every five undergraduate students in higher education is a parent](#), along with 1 in 3 graduate students. Many of these students have young children requiring childcare while working towards their degree or other credentials, making success in higher education a complex and challenging endeavor.

Parenting students should be lauded for working towards a degree or credential with children in tow, often while simultaneously maintaining part- or full-time employment. Parenting students are expected to do it all: work, study, and support their children. The unfortunate reality is that parenting students often fail to complete their programs in higher education because they are forced to juggle so many responsibilities. Research from the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) shows that [parenting students have higher GPAs](#) than students without parental responsibilities. However, parenting students are less likely to graduate, mostly due to all the other responsibilities these students manage on a daily basis.

Parenting students are not evenly distributed across all colleges and universities, with more parenting students enrolled at community colleges and four-year public institutions than at other types of schools. Given that knowledge and the absence of national student-level data for college students, bills like HB 0463 are vital to help schools improve their understanding of their parenting student population. Better data collection is an essential first step to improving college completion rates for student parents. Without comprehensive data collection on this vital student population, policymakers and institutional [leaders struggle to truly understand student parent experiences](#). Better data can help institutions dismantle the barriers impeding parenting students' academic and professional success, and provide the foundational knowledge needed to develop support structures to help these students succeed.

All too often, parenting students feel they have to choose between meeting their family's basic needs in the here and now and getting a degree to secure their long-term economic security. [Research from our team on older and parenting students in several states](#) has shown that parenting students do not receive the support they feel they need to be successful in higher education. As one parenting student in our focus groups noted, "we shouldn't have to choose between maintaining and bettering our lives".

Parenting students should also receive far more support than they currently do from the financial aid system; in particular, they should receive more help when accounting for the different costs that parenting students face compared to students without dependents. The first step in getting increased support for parenting students is to ensure that we have a proper accounting of how many parenting students are enrolled at Maryland colleges, how old their children are, and what kinds of support they need.

[Early research from Generation Hope](#), a non-profit focused on supporting parenting students on campuses shows that better data can help lead to improved institutional supports. Generation

Hope worked directly with a small cohort of colleges to implement more family-friendly policies on their campuses. This work showed that when colleges have better data about parenting students on their campuses, it becomes easier to advocate for and implement programs that support the success of parenting students. Other research from the SPARK project at [the Urban Institute has shown the immense complexity of parenting student's lives](#); anything that colleges and universities can do to make the lives of parenting students simpler should be investigated.

We encourage the committee to support HB 0463. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Edward Conroy, EdD, Senior Policy Advisor, New America, Higher Education Policy team

Da'Shon Carr, MPA, Policy Analyst, New America, Higher Education Policy team

Tia Caldwell, MPA, Policy Analyst, New America, Higher Education Policy team