

February 27, 2024

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Delegate Ben Barnes
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,

As a current advocate and higher education professional from Frederick County, I am writing to express my strong **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. Nationwide, 1 in 5 undergraduate students and 1 in 3 graduate students are parenting while in college. 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 parents' experiences and dismantle the barriers impeding their academic and professional success.

Supporting student parents is a matter of racial and social justice. Student parents are more likely to be students of color and live at or below the poverty line than their non-parenting peers. The unique challenges faced by student parents are not only due to their parental status, but also due to the many intersecting identities that impact their journeys to and through higher education. Supporting student parent success will help the state of Maryland reach its goals in regards to retention and graduation rates for Pell-eligible students and students of color. A report released by Maryland Higher Education Commission in September 2023 indicates that not many colleges are collecting this data and those that are, do not have a comprehensive picture. The commission recommends that better data collection is needed to understand the full needs of this unique, and overlooked, population.

My name is Valerie Fox. I've worked with many student parent's during my time as an employee in higher education. I've worked in Testing Centers, Student Affairs, Continuing Education, and

for Academic Departments. I've seen the additional barriers that student parent's face and think this issue is important and deserves careful consideration to move forward.

This legislation will allow State and institutional policymakers and leaders to access data that more accurately captures 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. This information will increase awareness of student parents and the unique barriers that they face and empower policymakers at every level to make informed decisions and provide targeted support for this often-overlooked population. Student parents deserve to be recognised and supported so that they can succeed in higher education and beyond.

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,
Valerie M. Fox