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January 31, 2025

Delegate Ben Barnes

Chair, Appropriations Committee

Maryland State Legislature

House Office Building, Room 121

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: Testimony in Support of House Bill 0298 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status

Dear Delegate Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

As a **graduate student parent** and a dedicated student parent advocate residing in Montgomery County, I am writing to express my strong support for HB 0298, which mandates the collection of data on the parental status of college students in Maryland. This legislation is a critical step toward ensuring that institutions and policymakers better understand and support student parents across the state.

Nationwide, one in five undergraduate students and one in three graduate students are parents. Despite these significant numbers, student parents remain largely invisible in higher education policy due to the lack of comprehensive data collection. Without this data, institutions and lawmakers struggle to design policies that adequately address the barriers student parents face in accessing and completing their degrees.

Supporting student parents is an issue of racial and economic justice. Student parents are more likely to be students of color and to live at or below the poverty line compared to their non-parenting peers. As a **graduate student parent**, I understand firsthand the challenges of balancing academic responsibilities, financial pressures, and caregiving. Many student parents, including myself, navigate higher education while juggling full-time coursework, employment, and childcare responsibilities—often without sufficient institutional support. The absence of formal data collection means that these challenges remain largely unrecognized, leaving student parents without the resources they need to persist and graduate.

This legislation will provide essential data that allows Maryland to develop targeted policies and allocate resources effectively to support student parents. National estimates suggest that more than 70,000 Marylanders are parenting while pursuing their education, yet most institutions do not formally track this student population. By collecting demographic data on student parents, Maryland can ensure that these students are no longer overlooked and that their needs are considered in higher education planning and policy development.

I urge the Appropriations Committee to support HB 0298 and advance Maryland's commitment to equitable access and success in higher education. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Yoslin Amaya Hernandez