

Salma Elakbawy
1200 18th St NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
elakbawy@iwpr.org
3/31/25

Senator Brian Feldman
Education, Energy & Environment Committee
Maryland State Legislature
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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

Dear Chair Brian Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy & Environment Committee

As a Senior Policy Analyst at the Institute for Women's Policy Research, 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. With one in five undergraduate students and one in three graduate students nationwide balancing academics and parenting, better data collection is a crucial step toward improving college completion rates for this group.

Comprehensive data collection will enable policymakers and institutional leaders to identify and address barriers faced by student parents. These barriers, often rooted in racial and economic disparities, hinder academic success. Supporting student parents is both a matter of equity and a key strategy for achieving Maryland's retention and graduation goals for students of color and Pell-eligible students.

The 2023 Maryland Higher Education Commission Report on Advising Systems and Wrap-around Services revealed that few institutions collect comprehensive data on student parents. Without accurate information, it's impossible to fully understand their needs or craft policies that promote their success.

IWPR has an established track record of research on student parents and why policymakers must address the hurdles they encounter. IWPR's analysis of the latest available data (NPSAS 20) shows that one in five college students are parents, meaning over 3 million students are raising children while pursuing a postsecondary degree. Out of this vast student-parent population, about three-quarters (2.3 million) are mothers.

The latest available data also show that the percentage of students raising children differs across racial and ethnic groups: 36 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native college students, 30 percent of Black college students, 18 percent of Latinx students, and 17 percent of white students are parents.

As the above-mentioned data points show, some data on student parents are available at the national level. However, IWPR encourages states to incorporate more data collection mechanisms to grasp a full picture of student-parent demographics at the state level. Data collection on student parent demographics is an essential key in highlighting and better addressing the needs of this population. Our conversations with many groups dedicated to serving and supporting student parents in various states also highlighted the gaps in data availability.

Student parents are enrolled in all types of institutions. According to IWPR research, 51 percent of student parents attend community and technical colleges, compared with 16 percent who attend public four-year institutions, 13 percent who are enrolled in private non-profit institutions, and 20 percent who attend private for-profit institutions. Better data collection would mean the availability of student parent data by institution type, which would enable examining different outcomes, including college retention and 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 has implications for gender and racial equity. 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. Better data collection is needed to bring visibility to — and to understand the full needs of — this unique population.

State, national, and private data on student parents are limited, siloed, or non-existent. Data collection on student parents is an essential part of addressing the needs of this important population. The lack of comprehensive data on student parents can lead institutions and policymakers to underestimate the prevalence of student parents and make students-parents and hence their needs invisible. Data collection is important to create a complete picture of a student-parent's experiences to inform better policies. Our organization's research finds demographic data collection covering student parents might enable states to better understand the magnitude of their student parent population and help policymakers better understand how student parents interact with various support systems and safety net programs. IWPR strongly recommends that states explore opportunities- such as this bill- to improve data collection and research at all levels, support institutions to collect information on enrolled student parents, and

identify ways to comparatively assess outcomes for student parents. Demographic data on student parents is necessary to cultivate support programs on campuses for this unique population. Demographic data collection on students is the first step on the road to addressing and supporting student parents' educational trajectories.

Passing HB 0298 will help to ensure Maryland has the tools to support its estimated 70,000 student parents, empowering them to thrive in higher education and beyond. By addressing their unique challenges, Maryland can be a leader in fostering student success and equity in higher education

I respectfully urge the Education, Energy & Environment Committee to support HB 0298 and take this vital step toward creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for student parents.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Salma Elakbawy