



March 27, 2025

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 - Demographic Data Collection - Parental Status

We write in support of HB 0298 and its stated aim of improving the data that Maryland has on parenting students in higher education.

New America’s higher education policy 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. Our extensive [work](#) in the

area of student parents, as well as the research from organizations we partner with, shows a need for the higher education sector to build and enhance strategies that support student parents on the path to degree completion.

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 child care while working towards their degree or other credentials, making success in higher education complex and challenging. Student parents earn [comparable GPAs](#) to those of nonparenting students, demonstrating they are academically capable, but are more likely to drop out due to a host of challenges balancing work, parenting, and academic demands.

Existing research on the student parent population relies heavily on the [National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey \(NPSAS\)](#), a survey undertaken every three or four years since 1987 to provide data insights to higher education researchers and policymakers. NPSAS, along with the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) are key in providing the higher education sector, researchers, and policymakers with evidence to understand trends in higher education access and completion. Both data collection efforts are housed within the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education.

Recent [reporting](#) showed that NCES, which employed more than 100 employees at the beginning of 2025, is down to just 3 employees after a federal reduction in force. [Serious questions](#) have been raised regarding how NCES will continue to collect higher education data and make it available to researchers and policymakers. It is more important than ever that states consider how to collect robust data so that they are able to identify trends in public institutions of higher education and are equipped with accurate information to make decisions that support their own state attainment goals.

It is critical to count and understand trends in access and completion for student parents, given that they make up 1 in 5 of all undergraduates. The looming [demographic cliff](#) (a decline in the number of 18 year olds and therefore high school graduates expected after 2025) makes it all the more essential that colleges and universities are prepared to serve adult learners who are more likely to have children. Maryland is expected to have [11% fewer high school graduates](#) between the years 2023-2041. To maintain a strong higher education sector that is equipped to support the workforce needs of the state, it will become even more important that colleges and the state are equipped to count student parents and understand their needs.

This data can help the state understand trends, support degree completion, and protect and maximize federal and state investments in higher education. It also represents an opportunity for Maryland to better understand student parents' needs, which can help Maryland higher

education institutions improve efforts to re-enroll adults with some college but no degree, and adults with children that have never enrolled.

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 0298 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 support. 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 0298. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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