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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Family Law – Child Support – Capacity of Minors to File Action - HB 120
Testimony of Maryland State Delegate Deni Taveras

Thank you, Chair Clippinger, and committee members. It is an honor to be before you all. I am here to ask for your favorable report on HB 120 – Family Law – Child Support – Capacity of Minors to File Action.

This bill grants underage mothers the ability to file for child support without the permission of a parent or guardian. Across the state, young mothers face significant barriers when seeking the financial support of their children, often due to parental consent requirements that delay or prevent timely action. This is not just an issue of legal access; it impacts the well-being of children, the stability of young families, and reaffirms cycles of poverty.

In our state, around 5% of births each year are to teen mothers, many of whom face financial instability. Nearly 30% of children living with single mothers are below the poverty line, and these circumstances are exacerbated when teen mothers cannot access child support due to legal hurdles. The teen birth rate (ages 15-19) declined by 20% from 24.2 in 2013 to a low of 19.3 in 2017. However, the rate among Hispanic teens (53.9%) was significantly higher compared to Black, non-Hispanic (12.8%) and White, non-Hispanic teens (4.7%) in Prince George's County. In addition, the teen birth rate in Maryland (ages 15-19) disproportionately impacted Hispanic and Black teens (72.8%) in 2022. Teen mothers are less likely to complete high school, with only about 50% graduating by age 22 compared to 90% of women who do not have children during adolescence. By allowing young mothers to file independently, this bill addresses a critical need and ensures these families receive the support they deserve.

Through this legislation, we seek to provide a practical solution to help young mothers have agency and advocate for themselves and their children. It will empower them to take responsibility for their child's well-being and ensure access to the financial resources necessary for a stable future. Moreover, this bill will reduce the burden on public assistance programs by promoting self-sufficiency.

In closing, I ask this esteemed committee for your favorable report on HB 120, supporting our young mothers and their children.

Percentage of Teen Pregnancies Ages 15-19 between 2018-2022										
County	BIPOC					NON-BIPOC				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Baltimore	4.60%	4.42%	4.78%	4.28%	3.80%	2.20%	1.91%	2.08%	1.27%	1.71%
Howard	2.59%	2.30%	2.53%	2.19%	1.48%	0.69%	0.51%	0.52%	0.48%	0.25%
Montgomery	3.30%	3.45%	3.16%	2.84%	2.83%	0.48%	0.48%	0.21%	0.24%	0.25%
Prince George	4.60%	4.88%	4.44%	4.09%	3.75%	2.04%	1.12%	0.92%	1.33%	1.04%
Baltimore City	8.84%	7.70%	8.17%	7.92%	6.59%	1.53%	2.21%	2.06%	1.49%	1.83%