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Delegate Ben Barnes
Chair, Appropriations Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
121 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 0420/House Bill 006 – Public Institutions of Higher Education - Pregnant and Parenting Students - Plan and Reporting

Dear Chair Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Yoslin Amaya Hernandez, and I am a graduate student parent, a Montgomery County resident, and a policy and advocacy professional working closely with student parents across Maryland. I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 0420/House Bill 006.

SB 0420/HB 006 builds on the Pregnant and Parenting Student Support Act by strengthening implementation and accountability across Maryland's public higher education system. While existing law requires institutions to develop plans to support pregnant and parenting students, SB 0420/HB 006 takes the critical next step by expanding those requirements to all public institutions and by requiring consistent data collection on students' parental status. Simply put, we cannot effectively support student parents if we do not know who they are.

Nationally, one in five undergraduate students and one in three graduate students are parenting while enrolled in college. In Maryland, student parents represent a significant but often invisible population. Without reliable, uniform data, institutions are limited in their ability to connect students to existing supports, evaluate whether those supports are working, or plan effectively for services such as child care, housing stability, academic flexibility, and health care access.

As both a student parent and someone who has worked closely with colleges, advocates, and policymakers, I have seen how the absence of data creates gaps in support. When student parents are not identified, they are often excluded from planning conversations, overlooked in resource allocation, and left to navigate higher education systems on their own. This invisibility disproportionately affects students of color and students with low incomes, making data collection an issue of equity as well as efficiency.

Maryland has already taken an important first step through the **2023 Maryland Higher Education Commission Report on Advising Systems and Wrap-around Services**, which provided a one-time snapshot of how institutions are supporting student parents. However,

that report also highlighted the lack of consistent and comprehensive data collection across institutions.

To build on this progress, I respectfully urge the Committee to reinstate the requirement for annual reporting on the data collected. A one-time report provides only a snapshot, but student parent populations and needs evolve. Ongoing, yearly data collection and reporting are essential to track progress, identify gaps, and ensure accountability across institutions. Without this requirement, the state risks losing the ability to measure whether these policies are truly improving outcomes for student parents.

This work is also gaining momentum beyond Maryland. Virginia recently passed similar legislation to collect data on student parents, signaling a growing recognition across states that data is essential to advancing student success and equity. Maryland has the opportunity to continue leading in this space by ensuring that its approach is not only implemented, but sustained over time.

SB 0420/HB 006 provides Maryland with the tools needed to better understand and serve an estimated 70,000 student parents across the state. By requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission to collect consistent demographic data, and by ensuring that this data is reported on an ongoing basis, this bill will allow institutions and policymakers to move from assumptions to informed action and ensure that existing legal requirements translate into meaningful, on-the-ground support.

I respectfully urge the Appropriations Committee to support Senate Bill 0420/House Bill 006 and strengthen it by reinstating the annual reporting requirement to ensure long-term impact and accountability.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Yoslin Amaya Hernandez