

April 3, 2026

Anne Mosle  
Ascend at the Aspen Institute  
2300 N St NW  
Washington, DC 20037  
anne.mosle@aspeninstitute.org

Delegate Ben Barnes  
Appropriations Committee  
Maryland State Legislature  
House Office Building  
Room 121  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 0420 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status

Dear Delegate Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

[Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#) appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 0420. This bill builds on the progress made by House Bill 0840, the Pregnant and Parenting Student Support Act, by strengthening implementation across Maryland’s public higher education system.

There are over [4 million](#) postsecondary students who are parents across the country. Student parents are highly motivated and succeed academically with an average [GPA of 3.17](#) for undergraduates. Despite this, they graduate at lower rates than their peers due to unintentional systemic and institutional barriers, with [only 17 percent](#) completing a degree in six years compared to 50 percent of non-parenting students. Without standardized data collection, student parents remain largely "invisible", and states, systems, and institutions cannot identify and address barriers preventing their success.

At Ascend, we know that education is essential and one of the most powerful predictors of intergenerational well-being and economic mobility. Earning a degree has the power to [double a parent’s income](#), and when parents earn degrees, [the likelihood of their children graduating college significantly increases](#). We also know that when parenting students are seen, supported, and engaged as leaders in postsecondary education, they not only succeed in credential attainment, they improve and strengthen the capacity and culture of postsecondary and workforce systems.

While House Bill 0840 laid the groundwork for supporting student parents through connections to campus and community resources, Senate Bill 0420 takes the essential next step by expanding this requirement to all public higher education institutions and requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission to collect consistent data on students' parental status. Senate Bill 0420 lays the foundation for data-driven policy, practice, and systems changes to improve education and employment outcomes

**ANNE B. MOSLE**

Vice President, Aspen Institute | Executive Director, Ascend at the Aspen Institute | Co-Chair, Aspen Forum on Women and Girls  
2300 N Street, NW, Suite 700 | Washington, DC 20037 | 202.736.2931

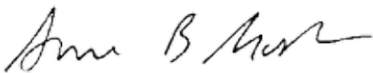
for the estimated 70,000 current student parents in Maryland as well as drives family-friendly institutional culture changes that can lead to more parents enrolling in postsecondary pathways.

The need for accurate data collection is underscored by the experience of Ascend Parent Advisor, Michaela Martin. As a single mother, Michaela needed child care to attend community college but her campus had a 2-3-year waitlist for child care services. When she brought this issue to the college administration, she was told the college would need data about how many students had children in need of care before any changes could be made. Recognizing the systemic barriers student parents face, Michaela successfully advocated for [Oregon Senate Bill 564](#), which now requires public postsecondary institutions in Oregon to collect and report data on the number of students with children. Michaela's story exemplifies why data collection is vital to implementing changes that truly support student parent success.

Passing Senate Bill 0240 will help drive data-driven decisions and family-friendly institutional change, empowering parents to thrive and positively impacting generations. By taking this vital step, Maryland can be a leader in fostering inclusion and student success in postsecondary education. Ascend respectfully urges the Appropriates Committee to support and pass Senate Bill 0420 with a requirement for annual data collection and reporting to foster a brighter and more equitable future for families in Maryland.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Anne Mosle  
Vice President, Aspen Institute  
Executive Director, Ascend

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