



## **HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

### **Senate Bill 420**

### **Public Institutions of Higher Education - Pregnant and Parenting Students – Plan and Reporting April 7, 2026 Information**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 420. The bill directs the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to collect data regarding the parental status of students from each public institution of higher education; establish a common format and timeframe for the collection; and report the findings on or before September 1, 2027 to the House Appropriations Committee as well as the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. Institutions must also post plans for pregnant and parenting students that are consistent with Title IX of the federal Higher Education Act by October 1, 2026.

The USM is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions, and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the State. Each of USM's 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

The University System of Maryland (USM) believes equal treatment and support for pregnant and parenting students is critical to ensuring that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. The campuses that comprise the USM have consistently implemented timely policies to keep these students in school, ensure their children's health – and in the end get closer their diploma and college completion.

USM institutions already allow pregnant students to request academic accommodations through designated support offices, addressing circumstances on a case-by-case basis in alignment with ADA requirements. This approach ensures flexibility for the unique and time-sensitive nature of pregnancy and related conditions, without the administrative delays inherent in statewide policy updates.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights enforces Title IX, which prohibits sex-based discrimination in federally funded education programs and explicitly protects pregnant and parenting students. This includes safeguarding their right to remain enrolled and receive equal access during pregnancy, childbirth, recovery, and related conditions. Strengthening awareness and compliance at the institutional level may offer a more agile and effective approach than layering additional mandatory reporting requirements.

The institutions within the USM fully recognize and uphold the rights of pregnant and parenting students under Title IX. Our leadership and staff are deeply committed to supporting these students, not only because it is a legal obligation, but because it aligns with our shared goal of increasing completion rates and fostering student success. Campuses continuously monitor what works, identify barriers, and adapt resources to meet evolving needs throughout the semester. This proactive, student-centered approach ensures that motivated students facing the challenges of parenthood have the support they need to thrive academically and complete their degrees.

The institutions are concerned that collection of pregnant and parenting status as a demographic characteristic of all students may create unintended privacy concerns. We suggest that reporting on this population be done in a manner that highlights the institutions' plans and services and focuses on those receiving them. This approach aligns with already existing reports such as the one on students registering for accommodations for disabilities.

The USM appreciates the opportunity to provide this information regarding Senate Bill 420.

