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Senator Brian Feldman

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Maryland State Legislature

2 West Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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

Dear Senator Brian Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

As a student parent advocate and policy researcher from the DMV area, I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 0420. This bill builds on the progress made by House Bill 0840, the Pregnant and Parenting Student Support Act, by strengthening implementation and accountability across Maryland’s public higher education system.

While HB 0840 established important requirements for public senior higher education institutions to adopt plans supporting pregnant and parenting students, SB 0420 takes the next critical step by expanding these requirements to all public institutions of higher education and by requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission to collect consistent data on the parental status of enrolled students. Simply put, we cannot effectively support student parents if we do not know who they are. SB 0420/HB 006 provides the structure needed to identify pregnant and parenting students and connect them to the supports already required under Maryland law.



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 comprehensive and uniform data collection, institutions and policymakers are limited in their ability to reach these students, assess whether supports are working, or ensure equitable access to services such as child care, health care, housing stability, and academic accommodations.

The 2023 Maryland Higher Education Commission Report on Advising Systems and Wrap-around Services revealed that few institutions collect comprehensive data on student parents. Without accurate information, it's impossible to fully understand their needs or craft policies that promote their success.

HCM Strategists recently helped educate policymakers in the nearby state of Virginia about the importance of ensuring accurate student parent data collection through the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV)'s existing instrument, which resulted in a bill that passed both chambers with tremendous support. The bill is on its way to the Governor's desk and advocates across the state are looking forward to being able to more intentionally target supports and resources towards the students who need it most.

Passing SB 0420 will ensure Maryland has the tools to support its estimated 70,000 student parents, empowering them to thrive in higher education and beyond. By addressing their unique challenges, Maryland can be a leader in fostering student success and equity in higher education. I respectfully urge the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to support SB 0420 and take this vital step toward creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for student parents. Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Sincerely,**  
**Julie Ajinkya, Ph.D.**



**About HCM Strategists**

*HCM Strategists, founded in 2008, is an impact-driven consulting firm that believes in the transformative power of education and career-competitive learning to improve social and economic mobility for all learners and communities, especially those that have been marginalized or historically underserved. Our work delivers a consequential impact on the national narrative, policy options, and leaders responsible for change.*