



**STATEMENT OF
STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
MARYLAND HOUSE**

BILL HEARING ON SB 420,

***“Public Institutions of Higher Education –
Pregnant and Parenting Students - Plan and Reporting”***

March 7, 2026

Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record on MD SB 420, *Public Institutions of Higher Education – Pregnant and Parenting Students – Plan and Reporting*. Student Veterans of America (SVA) writes in strong support of the intent of this legislation, which enhances Maryland’s ability to identify, support, and retain pregnant and parenting students through improved data collection and institutional planning. To fully realize its impact, we recommend strengthening the bill by addressing the reporting cadence, specifically by requiring an annual report. This adjustment would better align implementation with the lived experiences of student veterans and help ensure equitable access to support. We look forward to working together to advance and strengthen this important effort.

With a mission focused on empowering student veterans, SVA is committed to providing an educational experience that goes beyond the classroom. Through a dedicated and expansive network of more than 1,600 chapters across the country, SVA aims to inspire yesterday’s warriors by connecting student veterans with a community of like-minded chapter leaders.¹ Every day these passionate leaders work to provide the necessary resources, network support, and advocacy to ensure student veterans, military-connected students, their families, caregivers, and survivors can effectively connect, expand their skills, and ultimately achieve their greatest potential.

Maryland is home to more than 360,098 veterans, with an estimated 20,773 students currently using the GI Bill and roughly 4,000 new GI Bill users entering Maryland institutions each year. Student veterans bring approximately \$677 million into Maryland’s local economies annually, including education benefits and disability compensation.² These investments only reach their full return when students are supported to persist and complete. Parenting students, many of whom are student veterans, are central to that equation.

Nationally, roughly one in five undergraduates and one in four graduate students are raising children.³ Among student veterans, more than half are parents and about 20 percent are single parents. The vast majority (about 93 percent) are over age 25, and nearly 75 percent work while enrolled.¹ That number increases for women. These lived realities shape how students experience campus systems. When institutions are designed around a traditional student model, parenting student veterans face invisible barriers that delay completion and stifle workforce entry.

SVA’s Summer 2025 focus groups with Maryland student veterans surfaced a consistent theme: students are often invisible to institutions until they are already in crisis. One participant shared, “We ask on the application, but I have met quite a few veterans who I didn’t have on my list... they just found me... usually right before graduation.”⁴ This lack of consistent identification of veterans mirrors what pregnant and parenting students experience when institutions do not systematically collect or use data to guide support. SB 420 directly addresses

¹ Student Veterans of America. *Annual Census of Student Veterans*. Latest edition.

² Student Veterans of America. *Strengthening Maryland Policies for Student Veteran Success: Focus Groups, Summer 2025*.

³ Anderson, Theresa, et al. (2024). *Who Are Undergraduates with Dependent Children?* Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative.

⁴ Student Veterans of America. *Maryland Student Veteran Focus Groups, Summer 2025: Qualitative Findings*.

this gap by requiring institutions to pair data collection with intentional support plans rather than relying on students to self-advocate at the point of need.

Parenting responsibilities compound other basic needs challenges. In SVA's Maryland focus groups, student veterans described leaving exams or missing required coursework due to lack of childcare, transportation, or emergency funds. One student shared that they had to walk away from a monitored testing environment because they had no childcare available and could not afford a babysitter.⁴ In Maryland, about half of student veterans asked reported they had less than \$500 in a savings account and about half of those students had nothing.⁴ These experiences reflect structural friction points that disproportionately affect pregnant and parenting students and quietly erode persistence. Institutional plans required under SB 420 create the conditions for campuses to anticipate these challenges and coordinate supports before they derail enrollment.

SVA's research shows that student veterans persist and perform well academically even when not accounting for institutional supports,⁵ with classroom outcomes exceeding national averages.¹ It then becomes incumbent upon those within educational and institutional structures to consider the potential of these students to succeed when their realities are fully understood and incorporated into institutional design. Data provides the foundation for this shift. It allows campuses to move from reactive accommodation toward intentional, anticipatory support. When institutions know which of their students are parents, they can ensure reliable access to advising, benefits navigation, lactation spaces, flexible scheduling, childcare referrals, and emergency financial assistance. SB 420 moves Maryland toward that model.

Maryland's workforce goals are directly tied to this policy. Veterans who complete postsecondary credentials experience strong labor market outcomes and increased lifetime earnings.⁶ Yet delays in completion translate into postponed financial security and slower wealth accumulation. SVA's Maryland focus groups found that many students take stopgap jobs unrelated to their field simply to meet immediate income needs while enrolled.⁴ For parenting students, the pressure to prioritize short-term income over long-term career alignment is even greater. Supporting persistence through institutional planning is not only a student success strategy. It is a workforce development strategy.

Federal higher education data systems face uncertainty, making state-level data capacity increasingly important.⁷ SVA's work building state-based veteran education data systems demonstrates that timely, disaggregated data enables earlier intervention and more precise policy design. SB 420 positions Maryland to lead by ensuring that pregnant and parenting students are visible within institutional systems and that supports are aligned with real student pathways.

⁵ Cate, C. A., Lyon, J. S., Schmeling, J., & Bogue, B. Y. (2017). *National Veteran Education Success Tracker: A report on the academic success of student veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill*. Student Veterans of America.

⁶ Student Veterans of America Research & RAND Corporation. *Veteran Education and Workforce Outcomes*.

⁷ Blake, Jessica. "Under McMahon, ED Is Diminished but Not Dead, Experts Say." *Inside Higher Ed*, 2025.

At the campus level, SVA chapters regularly identify barriers related to childcare access, mental health, housing insecurity, and benefits navigation long before those challenges appear in statewide datasets, if they do at all. At the state level, SVA aggregates these lived experiences into research and policy recommendations that align education systems with workforce outcomes. SB 420 reflects this integrated approach. It recognizes that student success is cumulative. Persistence depends on early identification. Economic mobility is shaped while students are still enrolled. Progress is sustained only when basic stability is preserved through the transition into the workforce. When these elements align, opportunity compounds.

Updated Version of SB 420

SVA respectfully offers the following feedback on the updated version of SB 420, recognizing both positive changes and areas where additional refinement would strengthen the bill's impact.

SVA is pleased to see the struck language regarding the definition and the shift to directing Maryland Higher Education Commission to develop regulations. This approach ensures flexibility, accuracy, and long-term effectiveness, allowing the state to adapt to evolving higher education landscapes and student demographics without requiring legislative changes. It also enables stakeholder engagement to develop a definition that reflects real-world experiences and ensures consistent application across campuses. Additionally, a standardized data framework established through regulation promotes clarity, comparability, and more responsive support for parenting students.

SVA has concerns regarding the removal of the language "each September 1 thereafter" (pg. 3, lines 3–4), which would effectively convert this into a one-time data collection effort. An annual reporting requirement is critical to ensuring the legislation remains actionable and responsive, allowing the state to track trends, measure outcomes, and assess progress toward closing retention and graduation gaps for parenting students. It also promotes transparency and accountability while ensuring timely, relevant data to support informed decision-making for populations like student veterans.

SVA urges the Appropriations Committee to advance SB 420 with the above recommendations to ensure annual reporting. This bill represents a forward-looking approach to higher education accountability, recognizing today's students as workers, parents, caregivers, and future contributors to Maryland's economy. With better data and intentional institutional planning, Maryland can ensure that pregnant and parenting students, including the many student veterans raising families, are positioned not only to enroll, but to complete and thrive. The continued success of veterans in higher education in the Post-9/11 era is no coincidence. Throughout our nation's history, educated veterans have helped solve complex challenges and drive economic growth, and today's student veterans carry that legacy forward by strengthening Maryland's workforce and communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. SVA stands ready to support Maryland in implementing evidence-based strategies that strengthen student success and workforce outcomes.