

Ja'Bette Lozupone, D.O.L.
21021 Goshen Road
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20882
jabette@wishfuldoings.com
240-305-2426
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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 / House Bill 006 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Demographic Data Collection – Parental Status

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

As a proud former student parent, teen parent, and current higher education administrator leading student-parent initiatives at a public institution in Maryland, I am writing to express my strong and deeply personal support for Senate Bill 0420 / House Bill 006.

This bill builds directly 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 requirements for public senior institutions to adopt plans supporting pregnant and parenting students, SB 0420 / HB 006 takes the next critical and logical 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.

Put simply, we cannot effectively support student parents if we do not know who they are.

SB 0420 / HB 006 does **not** create new programs, new mandates, or new costs. Rather, it is a **cost-free expansion of existing law** that equips institutions to do what they already strive to do for student success: provide targeted, personalized support by efficiently connecting students to community-based and state-level resources for which they are already eligible. This bill ensures institutions can clearly identify parenting students and connect them to supports that already exist, improving retention, completion, and long-term economic outcomes for Maryland families.

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 consistent and comprehensive data collection, institutions and policymakers are limited in their ability to reach these students, assess whether supports are effective, or ensure equitable access to essential resources such as childcare, healthcare, housing stability, and academic accommodations.

The 2023 Maryland Higher Education Commission Report on Advising Systems and Wrap-around Services confirmed this challenge, noting that few institutions currently collect comprehensive data on student parents. Without accurate information, it is impossible to fully understand their needs or measure outcomes tied to enrollment, retention, completion, transfer, and employment.

My support for this bill is also deeply personal.

After becoming pregnant at 16 following my first semester away at college, I lost my campus housing. My priorities quickly shifted to full-time work, childcare, and continuing my education at a local community college. If not for a handful of faculty and staff who recognized my potential and supported me despite the absence of formal systems, I would not have earned my bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degrees.

I will forever be grateful for a college business professor who noticed that I consistently returned late from break to her once-per-week evening class. When she asked why, I explained that I was nursing my infant daughter. Without hesitation, she encouraged me to bring my daughter to class, nurse her in the back of the room, and step out only if needed. That simple act of recognition and flexibility ensured my academic success and affirmed that I belonged.

Today, I write to you as Dr. Ja'Bette Lozupone, a former teen parent, higher education administrator, and business owner, because one caring individual made the difference in the absence of systemic support. SB 0420 / HB 006 ensures that student success is not dependent on chance encounters with compassionate faculty, but instead supported by intentional, data-informed systems across all public institutions in Maryland.

Parenting students deserve to be seen, counted, and connected to the resources that support their success. Their outcomes should be measured, their contributions documented, and their determination to build economic prosperity for their families and communities recognized and celebrated.

Passing SB 0420 / HB 006 will ensure Maryland is prepared to support its estimated 70,000 student parents and position the state as a national leader in student success, equity, and workforce development.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support SB 0420 / HB 006 and take this vital step toward a more inclusive, efficient, and effective higher education system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ja'Bette Lozupone, D.O.L., MBA