



February 6, 2026

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 – Public Institutions of Higher Education, With Amendments - Pregnant and Parenting Students - Plan and Reporting**

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

As Director of the Pregnant Scholar Initiative,<sup>i</sup> the nation's legal resource center on the rights of pregnant and parenting students, I am writing to express my support for SB0420 and offer information on how the bill may be amended to better serve students and avoid discrimination.

*Support for data collection*

My organization provides technical assistance to higher education institutions nationwide, equipping administrators with the tools they need to recruit, retain, and graduate pregnant and parenting students. In my more than a decade of experience, a persistent problem exists; institutions cannot serve students if they do not know who they are. Moreover, not tracking student parents and their needs causes institutions to operate inefficiently—employing strategies that don't work, wasting precious state resources in the process.

While there are tens of thousands of student parents in Maryland,<sup>ii</sup> we are uncertain of exactly how many, where they are located, what their needs are, and whether they graduate. SB0420 would address this issue by requiring institutions to include parental status in demographic collection. It would also require institutions to track key details such as the age of the student's child(ren); these details are essential to assist institutions of higher education in their efforts to retain students and meet their needs. For example, understanding the ages of students' children enables institutions, state/local agencies, and community organizations to better assess childcare needs and tailor any services provided to the actual demand. By counting parenting students, we can more effectively allocate resources to support them—and evaluate whether the resources are having the desired effect.

Currently, the National Center for Education Statistics within the U.S. Department of Education collects some data on the student parent population. This data was already insufficient to meet the needs of states and educational institutions; now, with the dismantling of the Department of Education, we anticipate new problems with data availability and reliability.<sup>iii</sup> As such, it is critical for states to step in to collect this essential data so that they have the high-quality information they need to secure their economic future.



Supporting pregnant and parenting students—first, by counting them—is a small but worthwhile investment in student success. Student parents make up 1 in 5 undergraduate students and 1 in 4 graduates.<sup>iv</sup> While these students’ academic achievement is on par (if not higher) than that of their childless peers, they are also far less likely to graduate on time.<sup>v</sup> Yet when they do have the support they need to achieve their educational goals it brings far-reaching benefits; parents earn more income, and their children are more likely to reach their own educational goals.<sup>vi</sup>

*Amendments are needed to section on institutional plans*

Expanding the requirement to establish support plans for pregnant and parenting students would help more of these students access resources critical to meeting their educational goals. However, as currently written, SB0420 risks causing harm to vulnerable students and potential liability for institutions by requiring additional institutions of higher education to refer students to off-campus adoption and healthcare services (subsections (c)(2)(ii) and (iv)). These problematic provisions should be struck.

Providing referrals to off-campus healthcare and adoption providers creates liability concerns that institutions are ill-equipped to manage. Critical questions remain unanswered: How will these providers be properly vetted? Can campuses ensure providers don’t pressure young people toward or away from particular reproductive choices? How will campus staff be trained to provide referrals without bias? The risk is all too real; our helpline already receives calls from students who have been pressured to have an abortion or to continue their pregnancy against their wishes, and other institutions have recently been accused of coercing students to put their children up for adoption.<sup>vii</sup>

I respectfully urge the Committee to support SB0420, with amendments to strike subsections (c)(2)(ii) and (c)(2)(iv). Passing SB0420 will ensure Maryland has the tools to support its thousands of student parents, empowering them to thrive in higher education and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Lee, J.D.

Co-Founder and Director, Pregnant Scholar  
Co-Director, WorkLife Law



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<sup>i</sup> WorkLife Law’s [Pregnant Scholar Initiative](#) is the nation’s legal resource center on the rights of pregnant and parenting students in postsecondary education and is based at the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco. The Pregnant Scholar works with postsecondary institutions to help them understand their legal obligations to accommodate and not discriminate against pregnant and parenting students, as required by Title IX and various state laws. We also provide direct services to student parents and pregnant students who have questions about their legal rights.

<sup>ii</sup> See, e.g., Baker, Stephanie, “How Many College Students are Parents in Your State?,” New America, 2026, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/how-many-college-students-are-parents-in-your-state/>

<sup>iii</sup> Kathryn Palmer, Guttled NCES Releases First Batch of Higher Ed Data, Inside Higher Ed (September 25, 2025), available at: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/research/2025/09/25/guttled-nces-releases-first-batch-higher-ed-data>.

<sup>iv</sup> Theresa Anderson, et al. *Who Are Undergraduates with Dependent Children? An Updated Overview of Student-Parent Characteristics Using 2020 Data*. Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative, (2024) available at: <https://studentparentaction.org/resources/who-are-undergraduates-with-dependent-children-2020>.

<sup>v</sup> See, e.g., New Data Insights on Student Parents from a Multi-Organization Collaborative Effort, Institute for Women’s Policy Research, <https://iwpr.org/new-data-insights-on-student-parents-from-a-multi-organization-collaborative-effort/#:~:text=Student%20parents%20are%20highly%20motivated,peers'%20average%20GPA%20of%203.15>.

<sup>vi</sup> Theresa Anderson, “*What If Mom Went Back to School?*” Urban Institute, (2022) available at: <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/what-if-mom-went-back-school>.

<sup>vii</sup> Whitney Evans, ‘Liberty Lost’ podcast alleges program coerced pregnant teens into adoption, Virginia Public Media News (August 12, 2025) available at: <https://www.vpm.org/news/2025-08-12/liberty-lost-tj-raphael-maternity-home-family-life-services-adoption>.