



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 0420 – PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER
EDUCATION – PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS – PLAN AND REPORTING**

**Statement of
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**before the
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee of the Maryland State Legislature**

**SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE – BILL HEARING**

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*The views expressed are my own and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

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

My name is Theresa Anderson, and I am a senior fellow at the Urban Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy and research organization based in Washington, DC. **I am writing to express my support for S.B. 0420: Public Institutions of Higher Education – Pregnant and Parenting Students – Plan and Reporting**, which would require Maryland’s public institutions of higher education to collect and report data on pregnant and parenting students. The views expressed are my own and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

Supporting parenting students is a very effective two-generation strategy, but we cannot adequately support them if we do not know who they are. My research shows that when mothers return to school and complete postsecondary credentials, it yields long-term benefits for themselves and their children.¹ Among mothers born between 1957 and 1964, I found that those who reenrolled in school and completed two- or four-year college degrees earned, on average, over \$9,200 more annually. Their children were 38 percent more likely to finish college and earned over \$5,500 more annually before age 30. These effects were much larger than when mothers simply reenrolled in college, underscoring the importance of opening doors and supporting college completion to promote intergenerational mobility.

In other related research, we found that supporting parents to enter and complete college paid off for state taxpayers and the broader economy. In a review of three models of how to support student parents at public colleges in Virginia, all three netted a positive return to taxpayers in increased tax revenue and decreased benefit costs. This did not include the personal and multigenerational benefits to students and their families, which would result in larger returns. Student-parent programs had the highest return on investment at \$5.36 per \$1.00 spent, while on-campus child care resulted in the largest number of additional graduates.² In short, investments in student parents are not only socially beneficial but also fiscally prudent.

Parents are an important segment of the college recruitment population and represent an opportunity to upskill the Maryland workforce. An estimated half a million parents in Maryland do not have a college degree, and more than one-third have some college experience but no credential.³

National data indicate that parents are a significant share of postsecondary students, accounting for about 1 in 5 undergraduate students and 1 in 4 graduate students. But without insight into each college’s parenting population, individual institutions have been unable or unwilling to provide sufficient supports. In a 2022 review, we identified a lack of data on student parents’ characteristics, outcomes, and opportunities as a primary barrier to colleges and related systems supporting parents’ college success.⁴ For example, because they do not know how many students have children or how old those children are,

¹ Theresa Anderson, “[What If Mom Went Back to School?](#),” (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2022). Dollar values have been updated for inflation from the original research report to 2025 dollars.

² Garrett Hicks and Theresa Anderson, “[The Taxpayer Benefits of Supporting Student Parents: An Analysis of Three Policy Options for Virginia’s Public Colleges](#),” (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2024).

³ Theresa Anderson, “[Supporting Student Parents Pays Off](#),” (Washington, DC: Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge Collaborative, 2025).

⁴ Theresa Anderson and Autumn R. Green, [Roadmap for Change to Support Pregnant and Parenting Students: Putting Student-Parent Families at the Center of Recommendations for Practice, Policy, Research, and Investment \(Version 1.0\)](#), (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2022).

colleges tend to underprovide resources such as child care, benefit navigation, and financial aid officers who specialize in packages for students with dependent children. Colleges also miss opportunities to adjust campus life to benefit parents, such as scheduling courses at times that align with the schedules of students with children in public schools and offering family-friendly student life events. With a comprehensive understanding of their parenting student populations, colleges could also strengthen partnerships or forge new ones with public schools, public human service agencies, and local community-based organizations to support parents' academic engagement and success.

We have seen colleges use data to make internal changes and develop partnerships that promote student success in our work on the [Data-to-Action Campaign for Parenting Students](#). In this effort, we partnered with 23 colleges, universities, and college systems in four states that have student-parent data collection mandates as they implement new data collection and support efforts for parenting students. **Our work with colleges, systems, and states also showed that data collection was not overly costly or burdensome and that data improvements made to track parenting students, as well as responsive supports, could also be applied to other priority student populations.**

This bill would propel Maryland to the forefront of the movement to support college pathways for parents. Five states—[California](#), [Illinois](#), [Minnesota](#), [Oregon](#), and [Texas](#)—have passed legislation relating to counting and/or serving postsecondary parenting students in unique ways. **Requiring data collection in Maryland through legislation is necessary because no other data sources reliably identify parenting students at the college level.** The 2023 redesign of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) made it less useful for identifying students with dependent children, and many students did not complete the FAFSA before this change.⁵ Title IX of the Higher Education Act, which provides some protections for pregnant and postpartum students, does not have data collection or reporting mandates.⁶ The Maryland Higher Education Commission found in a 2023 report that colleges statewide are not voluntarily collecting data needed to identify the student-parent population.⁷ They noted, “[W]hen asked to provide counts of student parents on their campuses, the vast majority of institutions reported they have no information on the parental status of their students. Several institutions provided estimates of parent student counts by using data from the registrar or financial aid offices, noting that this may undercount these data.” Current estimates of students with dependent children come from national surveys from the US Department of Education and the US Census Bureau, but they cannot be disaggregated at the institutional level and take a narrow definition of “parent” that excludes many students serving in a parenting role for a child who is not a legal dependent.

Supporting parenting students not only supports families actively pursuing intergenerational mobility but also makes good economic sense for states. Passing a bill requiring colleges to identify their student parents would be a strong and necessary step toward improving education and economic outcomes for current and future generations of Marylanders.

⁵ Theresa Anderson, “[Colleges Will Need New Data Collection Efforts to Identify Parenting Students after Changes to Financial Aid Forms](#),” (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2024).

⁶ US Department of Education, “[Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance](#),” (Washington, DC: Federal Register, 2020).

⁷ Wes Moore, Aruna Miller, and Sanjay Rai, [Report on Advising Systems and Wrap-around Services](#), (Baltimore, MD: MHEC, 2023).