



February 5, 2026

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

[Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#) appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony in strong support of SB 0420/HB 006. 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.

We recommend passage of SB 0420 with amendments striking subsections (C)(2)(ii) and (iv) to protect pregnant students' autonomy and mitigate the risk of institutional discrimination.

### Support for Student Parent Data Collection

As a national leader in [two-generation \(2Gen\) approaches](#), Ascend recognizes that student parents represent a significant portion of our postsecondary population—nationally, 20% of undergraduates and 28% of graduate students are parenting. However, without standardized data collection, these students remain largely "invisible" to the very institutions designed to help them succeed.

While HB 0840 laid the groundwork for supporting this demographic, SB 0420/HB 006 takes the essential next step by expanding these requirements to all public higher education institutions and requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission collect consistent data on students' parental status. Simply put, we cannot effectively support student parents if we do not know who they are. SB 0420/HB 006 provides the necessary framework to identify pregnant and parenting students and connect them to the supports already mandated under Maryland law.

In Maryland, an estimated 70,000 student parents are currently navigating higher education. SB 0420/HB 006 provides the framework to ensure these students not only enroll but also thrive



and complete their degrees. By addressing these unique academic and systemic challenges, Maryland can position itself as a national leader in educational equity and student success.

The need for accurate data collection is underscored by the experience of one of our Parent Advisors, Michaela Martin. As a single mother, Michaela needed child care in order to attend community college. However, her campus had a 2-3 year waitlist for child care services, despite her program lasting only two years. When she brought this issue to the college administration's attention, she was told the college would need data about how many students had children in need of care before any changes could be made. Recognizing the systemic barriers student parents face, Michaela successfully advocated for [Oregon Senate Bill 564](#), passed in 2021, which requires public postsecondary institutions in Oregon to collect and report data on the number of students with children. Her story highlights the urgent need for SB 0420/HB 006, as data collection is a foundational step toward implementing policies that truly support student parents.

### Recommendations on Amending Institutional Support Plans

While we fully support efforts on college campuses aimed at increasing student parent supports through referrals, we are concerned with specific language in the legislation that requires postsecondary institutions make referrals to adoption services and off-campus health providers. Mandating such referrals raises concerns that students could experience pressure—whether explicit or implicit—or that institutions could inadvertently interfere with pregnant students' legally protected right to an education free from harassment and discrimination.

Ascend respectfully urges the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to support and pass SB 0420/ HB 006, with amendments to strike subsections (c)(2)(ii) and (iv) to protect pregnant students' autonomy and prevent colleges from increasing their risk of discriminating against pregnant students.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MS", written in a cursive style.

Marjorie Sims  
Managing Director  
Ascend at the Aspen Institute