



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/House Bill 0006-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,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony related to Senate Bill 0420/House Bill 0006. New America is a policy think tank based in Washington, D.C., and our higher education program is a team of researchers and advocates who are dedicated to making higher education more equitable and accountable so that every student has the chance to obtain an affordable, high-quality education after high school. Within our Student Parent Initiative, we conduct research and provide federal, state, and institutional policy recommendations grounded in evidence to promote the success of student parents. For this reason, we are uniquely positioned to provide testimony that supports data transparency, while also calling for ways to improve the bill to protect pregnant students' privacy and autonomy.

We encourage the committee to support and pass SB0420 with amendments to strike subsections (C)(2)(ii) and (iv) to protect pregnant students' autonomy and prevent colleges from increasing risks of discriminating against pregnant students.

Support for Student Parent Data Collection

Student parents are a significant presence on campuses, making up about 1 in 5 undergraduates and 1 in 4 graduate students.¹ The majority of parenting students are female, people of color, and on average older than the traditional college student.² In Maryland, this is an estimated 44,000 undergraduate degree-seeking students and 32,000 graduate students,³ but we do not know at which institutions or programs parenting students are enrolled and lack institution or state-level data on their persistence and graduation. This significantly limits colleges and state lawmakers in supporting retention and graduation for parenting students, who represent significant college attainment and workforce potential in the state.

A lack of actionable data on parenting students to inform policy for these students jeopardizes state and federal investments in higher education and the workforce. It also puts students at risk of investing money, time, and energy into a postsecondary program that doesn't pay off, or worse, leaves them with student

¹ Anderson, Theresa, et al. 2024. *Who Are Undergraduates with Dependent Children? An Updated Overview of Student-Parent Characteristics Using 2020 Data*. n.p.: Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative.

² Ibid.

³ From analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) 2023 data, which is likely an undercount of student parents. For more, see 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/>



loan debt and depleted financial resources but without improved job prospects and financial security. In order to better support parenting students and protect state and federal investments in higher education, we need better data which is why bills like SB0420 are vital.

Existing research on the parenting student population relies heavily on the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS), a survey that provides data insights to higher education researchers and policymakers but is limited in its utility for state-level analyses. This data collection effort is housed within the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education, which has experienced a federal reduction in force over the past year and tumultuous moving of programs to other federal agencies. Serious questions have been raised regarding how NCES will continue to collect higher education data and make it available to researchers and policymakers.⁴ It is more important than ever that states consider how to collect robust data so that they are able to identify trends in higher education and are equipped with accurate information to make decisions that support state goals.

Ultimately, the significant responsibilities that parenting students carry creates unique challenges that can cause them to stop out of college or delay their progress working toward a credential. Better data collection can help Maryland higher education leaders and lawmakers identify barriers that parenting student parents face and plan strategically to improve postsecondary attainment for this population.

Suggested Amendments on Institutional Support Plans

While colleges can play an important role in connecting student parents to resources that support them in meeting essential needs, some provisions in the legislation risk harming students and placing colleges at risk of violating pregnant students' rights under Federal Title IX and state laws.

We recommend striking subsection (c) (2)(ii) and (iv) that would require institutions to make referrals to adoption services and off campus health providers. Requiring colleges to refer students to adoption and health resources raises concerns about whether students could experience pressure or whether institutions could, even inadvertently, interfere with pregnant students' legally-protected right to an education free from harassment and discrimination. In addition, colleges are not well positioned to evaluate or oversee the quality of external health care providers, and referral requirements could create uncertainty or potential liability if institutions direct students to providers that do not meet appropriate standards or engage in practices inconsistent with students' needs or choices.

We encourage the committee to support and pass SB0420, 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. Our team is also available for follow up questions and happy to provide additional research or resources on student parents in higher education. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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⁴ Blake, Jessica, "Under McMahon, ED Is Diminished but Not Dead, Experts Say," Inside HigherEd, 2025, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2025/11/03/under-mcmahon-ed-diminished-not-dead-experts-say>