



April 7, 2026

Delegate Ben Barnes  
Appropriations Committee  
Maryland State Legislature  
House Office Building  
Room 121  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Subject:** Testimony In Support of Senate Bill 420-Maryland Higher Education Commission -Demographic Data Collection - Parental Status, Favorable with Amendment

Dear Delegate Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 420. My name is Stephanie Baker and I'm here on behalf of New America, a federal policy think tank based in Washington, D.C. Our higher education program is a team of researchers and advocates dedicated to making higher education more equitable, inclusive, and accountable. I work on our Student Parent Initiative, which conducts research and provides federal, state, and institutional policy recommendations grounded in evidence to promote the success of student parents.

I'm here today to support SB420 and the reconciling of the amendments made by the Senate, with one exception. Our team recommends keeping rather than striking the language on page 3, lines 3-4 of the bill that reference a report "each September 1" after September 1, 2027. We believe that keeping that language and requiring a report annually, rather than one-time, will enable longer-term success for the state in identifying parenting students and closing gaps in their retention and graduation rates. Other states including California, Illinois, Texas, Minnesota, and Oregon<sup>1</sup> have passed similar legislation that require annual data collection.

Without comprehensive data collection on parenting students, their needs remain invisible to state lawmakers and institutional leaders. This ultimately jeopardizes state postsecondary attainment and workforce goals, as well as federal and state investments in higher education.

Prior research in Maryland has identified that a lack of data collection practices limit colleges' ability to identify parenting students who need support that helps them stay enrolled.<sup>2</sup> Because it is rare that colleges collect data on students' parental status, we use national surveys to estimate the prevalence of student parents. We know they have a significant presence on campuses, making up about 1 in 5

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, T., Baker, S., Obatuase, E., "Debunking Myths on Student Parent Data Collection," New America, 2026, <https://www.newamerica.org/insights/debunking-myths-on-student-parent-data-collection/>

<sup>2</sup> Mechenbier, M., Ali, E., and Girod, K., "Responding to the Needs of Student Parents in Maryland," Beeck Center for Social Impact and Innovation, 2025, <https://beeckcenter.georgetown.edu/responding-to-the-needs-of-student-parents-in-maryland/>



undergraduates<sup>3</sup> and 1 in 4 graduate students.<sup>4</sup> National research shows that 17 percent of undergraduate student parents complete their degree in 6 years compared to 50 percent of their peers.<sup>5</sup> Parenting students earn similar GPAs<sup>6</sup> to their nonparenting peers, because it is not academic capability but other barriers that get in the way of degree completion for them. With thoughtful data collection, lawmakers and college leaders can better understand where parenting students are enrolled in Maryland and take steps to support them on the path to degree completion.

We encourage the committee to support the passage of SB420 and reconcile the senate's amendments, except for the striking of the language that would turn this effort into one-time data collection effort rather than an annual collection. 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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Ewaoluwa Obatuase, MPP, Policy Analyst, New America, Higher Education Policy Team  
Richard Davis, Jr., MPA, Policy Analyst, New America, Higher Education Policy Team

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<sup>3</sup> Anderson, T., Gittens, S., and Westaby, K. *Undergraduate Student Parents*. Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative, <https://studentparentaction.org/resources/infographic-undergraduate-student-parents>

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, T., Gittens, S., and Westaby, K. *Graduate Student Parents*. Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative, <https://studentparentaction.org/resources/infographic-graduate-student-parents>

<sup>5</sup> Hicks, G. and Anderson, T. *The Taxpayer Benefits of Supporting Student Parents: An Analysis of Three Policy Options for Virginia's Public Colleges*. Urban Institute, 2024; <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/Taxpayer-Benefits-of-Supporting-Student-Parents.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, T., Dundar, A., Gittens, S., Ryberg, R., Schreiber, R., Taylor, L., Warren, J., Westaby, K. *Who are Undergraduates with Dependent Children? An Updated Overview of Student Parent Characteristics Using 2020 Data*, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/who-are-undergraduates-dependent-children>