



March 3, 2020

Chair Paul Pinsky
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Testimony in **SUPPORT** of SBo791

Dear Chair Pinsky and Committee Members,

CASA, the largest immigrant rights organization in Maryland, submit this letter outlining our **SUPPORT for SBo791** --- County Boards of Education - Pregnant and Parenting Students - Policies and Reports --- which requires each county board of education to establish policies to support and improve the educational outcomes of pregnant and parenting students.

In 2015, CASA along with Prince George's County Public Schools and the International Network for Public Schools opened two public high schools seeking to improve the graduation rates of immigrant, first generation students in Prince George's County in school environments that integrated mastery based learning while adopting a community school model that would provide holistic supports for each student. In 2019, a 100 students graduated from each school. At International High School in Langley Park, two students stood out: Maria and Josselyn. Each of them had graduated on time and were parents.

Most students at these schools fit one of two profile types: newcomer students or first-generation immigrant students. Each student profile type has unique needs, but both are underserved and face enormous challenges to success. Newcomer students are at very high risk for dropping out, after arriving in the U.S. at a later age with limited (or no) English language skills, interrupted schooling, often unstable family relationships and families separated by borders, recent trauma from their home countries and their journey (most students are fleeing horrific violence and poverty in their home countries, and many students, especially girls, are victims of sexual assault during their journey). First-generation students face different challenges – as the most bilingual members of their households, they frequently play adult roles in their families, growing up faster than their U.S. born counterparts. Because they are serving in a “parent” role to their families in navigating health care systems, landlords, and frequently employers, they often do not have the support they need to navigate the college application process. They face enormous pressure from parents who have given up everything to help them achieve the “American dream,” and frequently suffer depression and anxiety when they are not able to live up to the outsized expectations they believe their parents have for them. Both groups of students are continually navigating two worlds – the immigrant world of their parents and families, and the U.S. world of their school and community. Josselyn and Maria fit these two roles and despite their challenges they were able to graduate from high school on time and be mothers.

Maria arrived in the United States pregnant, fleeing violence from her native El Salvador, alone but seeking stability and peace. She was placed in a shelter for 3 months and then released to a sponsor. When she arrived at International High School at Langley Park (IHSLP), she was nearly 8 months pregnant and was eagerly received and immediately support staff and teachers got to work to ensure she would get medical care, furniture, clothing and more before the arrival of her baby. Additionally, Maria and her school support team created a plan to ensure she would stay on track to complete her studies for that year. And this same plan would be modified and adjusted accordingly to ensure Maria had the supports and resources she needed to be a mother, work to provide for her child and graduate on time. Josselyn was a first generation immigrant who had excelled in middle school and was clear that she wanted to go to college. She became pregnant in the second semester of her freshmen year but her dream to get to college never diminished. Like Maria, Josselyn had a school support team at IHSLP who ensured that she stayed on track to graduate on time through schedule accommodations, online class access and social services supports. Josselyn also graduated on time and enrolled in the Prince George's Community College.

Their stories are unique. According to a 2018 Child Trends¹ report on average 53% of teen mothers receive a traditional high school diploma (47% of Latina teen mothers graduate on time), 17% receive a GED. By contrast, 90 percent of women who did not give birth as teens obtained a traditional high school diploma. It is stories like that of Maria and Josselyn that show that when teen parents are given holistic support they can and will achieve high school graduation and achieve beyond expectations of them because of their roles as parents at an early age. We also know that the children of teen mothers that graduate from high school or receive a GED are more likely to pursue higher education themselves. SB0791 would help school districts across Maryland come up with interventions that may bolster the chances of more teen parents to feel supported to continue with their studies and ensure a first step towards a stable and secure life for themselves and their children. We urge a favorable report to SB0791.

Thank you,

Maritza Solano
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CASA

¹ <https://www.childtrends.org/half-20-29-year-old-women-gave-birth-teens-high-school-diploma>