

February 23, 2021

Margo Candelaria, Ph.D., Research Assistant Professor and the University of Maryland School of Social Work, Institute for Innovation and Implementation urges the House Ways and Means Committee to issue **a favorable report on SB470 - Institute for Innovation and Implementation - Pregnant, Expectant, and Parenting Students - Data Collection and Reports**, sponsored by Senator Washington.

I am writing to share my favorable support for **SB470** which will provide support to select school districts to learn better strategies for identifying and document student pregnancy and parenting status which will lead to more accurate identification of student needs. In order for youth who are pregnant or parenting to have better futures, we need to support them in finishing school and having the supports they need to be successful parents and students.

Maryland's public high schools reported a graduation rate of 86.6% in 2019, the lowest rate in recent years, attributing to thousands of students dropping out high school.<sup>1</sup> However, Maryland's public high schools reported that only 49 students formally withdrew during the previous academic year for "pregnancy" or "parenting" reasons.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, according to aggregated data collected between 2011 and 2017, 11 counties in Maryland have teen birth rates higher than the national average with Baltimore City and Dorchester County having rates over twice as high.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, there are discrepancies between youth pregnancy rates and school documentation of students who are pregnant and parenting, including those who leave the school system due to those circumstances. In order to best support youth who are pregnant and parenting, we first need to be accurate in identifying who they are and tracking their outcomes.

Current practice in many places includes an exit interview with students who have left the school system. However, rates are low. The data tracking systems in place now are not effective and not accurately informing the local school systems or the state about the true circumstances and needs of Maryland's youth. We do not actually know what percentage of students are leaving due to pregnancy and parenting. Knowing this would allow us to better support students to remain engaged in school which leads to better outcomes for them and their children. We need accurate data to better understand who is struggling with pregnancy and parenting as a student and who does not remain engaged in school due to being pregnant or parenting. We also need data to be collected consistently across jurisdictions so that we can have a better understanding of the student circumstances across the state. This requires systematic training and support on data collection and reporting strategies and methods to ensure the data is accurate and consistent across jurisdictions.

**We know that identifying and supporting youth who are pregnant and parenting leads to better outcomes.** The HHS sponsored Pregnancy Assistance Fund which has funded 81 projects in 32 states to

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland Report Card. 2019 Progress Report.

[https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/PrintReports/2019/StateReports/English/2019MDReportCard\\_ENG.pdf](https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/PrintReports/2019/StateReports/English/2019MDReportCard_ENG.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Summary of Attendance for Maryland Public Schools 2017-2018

<http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20172018Student/2018Attendance.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2019). County Health Rankings, Maryland 2011-2017. Teen Birth.

<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/maryland/2019/measure/factors/14/data?sort=sc-2>

support pregnant and parenting youth<sup>4</sup> clearly demonstrates this. Since 2010, programs across the country have repeatedly demonstrated that by identifying and **supporting youth who are pregnant and parenting, they are more likely to graduate from high school, plan on attending college, and engage in parenting support programs**. I was the lead evaluator for the Baltimore City Pregnancy Assistance Fund Project, Map to Success, which was funded from 2018-2020, with funds granted to the Maryland Department of Health who funded the Baltimore City Health Department<sup>5</sup>. Over two years we served 680 pregnant and parenting youth, with 39% served within high schools. These students engaged in community supports to allow them to remain in school such as accessing childcare, parenting programs, and additional community support services. This is just one project demonstrating the importance of accurately identifying pregnant and parenting students to allow them to stay in school.

It is clear that there is a substantial discrepancy between the data Maryland currently collects and the true circumstances of youth regarding the number of students dropping out of school due to pregnant and parenting reasons, or those struggling to stay in school while pregnant and parenting. We at the Institute are offering our partnership to address this discrepancy and to improve the accuracy of the data collection systems. The intention is to both close the gap in reporting and data dissemination, and to improve outcomes for youth. Youth who finish high school have significantly better life outcomes including college entry, housing, employment, and parenting outcomes. Accurately identifying and supporting these youth will have positive outcomes for our state. We recognize that there are costs associated with these activities. These costs are needed to do the proper training and support for data collection at the local sites as well as high quality analyses and reporting. The Institute for Innovation and Implementation is highly experienced in completing this type of work. *However, we cannot absorb the costs of the activities.*

For these reasons, The University of Maryland School of Social Work, Institute for Innovation and Implementation **urges a favorable committee report on SB470**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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Pronouns: She, Her, Hers

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<sup>4</sup> Margolis, et al. (2020).

[file:///C:/Users/mcandelaria/Downloads/Margolis2020 Article MeetingTheMultifacetedNeedsOfE.pdf](file:///C:/Users/mcandelaria/Downloads/Margolis2020%20Article%20MeetingTheMultifacetedNeedsOfE.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Candelaria, M., Zhu, S., Afkinich, J., & Schdaimah, C. (2021). [HHS PAF Final report 2021](#)