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# MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

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## **HB0401: PUBLIC SCHOOLS - PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS - POLICIES AND REPORTS**

**JANUARY 27, 2021, 1:00PM**

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland's public school systems. We are committed to making discipline responsive to students' behavioral needs, fair, appropriate to the infraction, and designed to keep youth on track to graduate. **CRSD strongly supports House Bill 401**, which would require existing secondary school personnel to coordinate supports needed to help pregnant and parenting youth stay in school and prevent school push-out, while establishing designated private lactation spaces and establishing a liaison in each school district to connect pregnant and parenting youth with childcare and transportation resources.

We seek to ensure that any Maryland youth, regardless of gender or pregnancy status has full accessibility to educational resources to assist them in completing their education. There should be no barriers to the rights of pregnant or parenting students in obtaining their education and thus, requiring schools to provide supports and resources can increase these students' ability to succeed in realizing both goals towards family formation and economic security. We support the need to identify existing school personnel who can coordinate and secure existing onsite or offsite resources for childcare, transportation, and lactation supports for pregnant and parenting youth.

Nationally, close to half of female school dropouts and one-third of male dropouts report that becoming a parent was a factor in their decision to leave school. Vital statistics reports show that in 2018, there were 2645 births to teenagers under the age of 19 in the state.<sup>1</sup> However, we currently have no information about their graduation rates, as pregnancy and parenting status is not recorded for students in state database systems. We know that nationally, only 40% of teenage mothers finish high school, often leaving school due to the lack of support for childcare, attending doctor's visits, and finding resources to help balance parenting responsibilities and full-time coursework.<sup>2</sup> We strongly feel that pregnant and parenting students should be included among the youth that deserve as rigorous an education as their non-pregnant and parenting peers, and their needs are addressed as part of the "at-promise" population.

Pregnant and parenting students may experience unwelcoming, inequitable, or stigmatizing school environments or practices by school personnel. Under Title IX, "school pushout" practices are prohibited, such as lack of accommodations for childcare and lactation,

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<sup>1</sup> Power to Decide: The Campaign to End Unplanned Pregnancy <https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/national-state-data/maryland>

<sup>2</sup> Summary of Attendance for Maryland Public Schools 2017-2018  
<http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20172018Student/2018Attendance.pdf>

stigmatization and harassment from peers and staff, and involuntary leave from school.<sup>3</sup> Title IX ensures that students who are pregnant or parenting are protected by allowing continued participation in classes and extracurricular activities, provided reasonable adjustments in the learning environment, authorized excused absences due to pregnancy or childbirth (as was passed by the 2017 Maryland General Assembly through HB0616/SB0232), and allowed time to make up missed work. However, while some schools seek to support these students, other choose to make the school climate dynamics so toxic that pregnant students may choose to drop out of school during pregnancy or decide to not return. In other instances, students have been blocked from enrolling in school or banned from returning once it is believed that a student is pregnant.

Pregnant or parenting students experience discrimination from principals, teachers, mentors, counselors, school volunteers, and other youth. This ultimately harms new parenting students in preventing them from completing their education, making these students and their children more likely to struggle with housing and/or economic security, and rely on public assistance programs.<sup>4</sup> The dropout crisis experienced by this group of students has severe short- and long-term consequences for the economic success and well-being for their families and communities.

Sex discrimination that interferes with a pregnant or parenting student's authentic participation in school can lead to real threats to educational attainment and financial stability for generations.<sup>5</sup> Those who have lower educational attainment are more likely to be unemployed, less likely to accumulate higher household wealth, and face worse health outcomes in comparison to their peers.<sup>6</sup> Targeted school support and resources for pregnant and parenting teens can aid in reducing negative outcomes and increase the goal of ensuring educational attainment for these students.

Very, very few public schools within our state provide a portion of these resources. For example, Benjamin Franklin High School in Baltimore City has an onsite day care which allows parenting students to attend classes during the day, as well as transportation provided to and from school for parenting students and their children.<sup>7</sup> However, HB0401 is not seeking that funds be expended to create new resources on campuses, or that new personnel be hired to fill the roles as coordinators. With technical assistance through advocacy groups and the Maryland State Department of Education, local implementation in identifying existing resources and strategies for coordination with existing staff for each school district is quite possible. These types of services not only assist young parents in graduating, but provide the ability to destigmatize notions about these students staying in school and obtaining their high school diplomas.

Members of CRSD work directly with students, families, and community stakeholders across the state. Based on their experiences, many schools in Maryland lack the supports needed for

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education. *Know Your Rights: Pregnant or Parenting? Title IX Protects You from Discrimination at School*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-know-rights-201306-title-ix.html>

<sup>4</sup> Hoffman, S. D., & Maynard, R. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Kids having kids: economic costs and social consequences of teen pregnancy* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press

<sup>5</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures. (2013). *Postcard: Teen Pregnancy Affects Graduation Rates*. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/teen-pregnancy-affects-graduation-rates-postcard.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> <sup>6</sup> Perper K, Peterson K, Manlove J. 2010. Diploma Attainment among Teen Mothers. *Child Trends Research Brief*. No. 2010-01.

<sup>7</sup> [Yvonne Wenger, School-based daycare in South Baltimore helps teen parents graduate. The Baltimore Sun April 12th, 2017](#)

pregnant and parenting students to continue on track to graduate. Therefore, **HB0401 aims to help prevent school push-out of pregnant and parenting students and shed light on these important issues to provide a basis for well-informed policies and practices around educating all Maryland students. For these reasons, CRSD strongly supports House Bill 401.**

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