

HB0401 - Public Schools - Pregnant and Parenting Students - Policies and Reports
Presented to the Hon. Anne Kaiser and Members of the Ways and Means Committee
January 27, 2021 1:30 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Anne Kaiser and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

We are writing today to express our enthusiastic support of HB0401 because of the immediate need to support pregnant and parenting youth in Maryland's public schools. If passed, this legislation would prevent school dropout for pregnant and parenting youth by establishing and strengthening support systems in schools through the designation of a private and safe lactation space, assignment of a liaison within the school to connect pregnant and parenting youth with resources, and by requiring schools to publish and share policies that protect the educational outcomes of these students.

Vital statistics reports show that in 2018, there were 2645 births to teenagers under the age of 19 in the state.¹ However, Maryland has little data on what happens beyond this statistic, as pregnancy and parenting status is not recorded for students and the state is therefore unable to track their educational outcomes. 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.² Importantly, new mothers also face the barrier of trying to find a safe and private space for lactation, as few high schools offer a place to do so. Allowing a mother to breastfeed her baby in a safe and private space on school grounds will not only allow her to tend to her child's needs, but also reduce the likelihood that she will leave school due to a lack of support.

HB0401 will support pregnant and parenting youth by connecting students with the necessary resources to achieve their desired pregnancy, parenting, and education related goals. This bill will:

1. Establish a safe and private lactation space in each Maryland public high school with a designated tabletop space, sink, and outlet for a breast pump. These spaces will not be closets or bathrooms.
2. Assign a liaison in each school who will be responsible for connecting pregnant and parenting students with resources pertaining to childcare and transportation.
3. Require each school district establish and the state department of education establish a model policy to support the education and parenting goals of students
4. Support training for school personnel to offer further guidance and support.

The COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to have an impact on Maryland's youth, especially those needing to balance pregnancy or parenting responsibilities and their academic curriculum. Before the pandemic, Maryland's public schools had the lowest graduation rate in recent years with only 86.6% of students graduating with their cohort in 2019.³ While we have yet to learn how graduation rates will be impacted by the pandemic, we know that now more than ever, it is important to consider the needs of pregnant and parenting youth.

The undersigned organizations support HB0401, Public Schools-Pregnant and Parenting Students-Policies and Reports and encourage a favorable report from the committee.

Joel Spielberger, ACLU of Maryland
Melissa Rock, Advocates for Children and Youth
Patricia Liggins, Birth Supports United
Janet Max, Healthy Teen Network
Maryland National Organization for Women
C.R. Valeriann, Baltimore NOW
Jeannette Feldner, Montgomery County NOW
Michelle Ogunwole, Physician
Ashley Black, Public Justice Center
Keontae Kells Family League of Baltimore