



HB1201 - Task Force on Educational Outcomes of Pregnant and Parenting Students in High School and GED Programs

Presented to Hon. Anne R. Kaiser and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee

February 22, 2019 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the House Ways and Means Committee a favorable report on HB1201 - Task Force on Educational Outcomes of Pregnant and Parenting Student in High School and GED Programs**, sponsored by Delegate Alice Cain.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. As part of our efforts to protect and expand these rights for all Marylanders, we work to ensure every childbearing individual has the freedom to decide if, when, and how to form one's family, and to parent with dignity, in safety, and in good health. We honor pregnancy in all its complexity. In doing so, we support pregnant and parenting students as they navigate the challenges of building their families and completing their education.

In 2017, approximately 750 youth age 17 and under gave birth in Maryland, with an additional 1,952 births for individuals between 18 and 19 years of age.¹ In that same year, the Maryland General Assembly passed HB616 requiring schools to enact an excused absence policy for pregnant and parenting students needing to miss classes for medical and legal reasons, as well as to care for their children with health needs, so they are not identified as truant or accused of child neglect. In our work to encourage implementation of this new law and call attention to how it can help these students, we realize more and more that very little is known about their educational outcomes and the full scope of barriers these youth face in realizing their educational goals.

A major concern is that current systems for tracking student educational outcomes in Maryland appear to not record instances of pregnant and parenting student drop-out or pushout. In the United States, close to half of female dropouts and one-third of male dropouts report that becoming a parent was a factor in their decision to leave school.² Poor school climate contributes to school pushout as many pregnant and parenting students experience unwelcoming, inequitable, or stigmatizing school environments, discriminatory practices by school personnel, and harassment by other students left unaddressed. As it is a Title IX violation for publicly funded schools to suspend or expel a student for being sexually active, being pregnant, for pregnancy-decision making, or for actively parenting, schools that want to punish, embarrass, or humiliate these youth engage in hurtful interactions that push students to leave their schools or make conditions so intolerable that students will drop out. Since female students are the ones carrying pregnancies to term, the developing pregnant body may trigger negative reactions from school personnel and other students towards them, but less so towards male students involved in these same pregnancies. Although male students may experience some discrimination for being sexually active, participating in one's pregnancy, or actively parenting, it is not to the degree faced by female students. It is common to find that expectations of female students obtaining diplomas are lower than male students preparing for parenthood – although new studies show that the responsibility of parenting quite often sparks renewed interest among new mothers in getting that diploma.³ A 2014 study done by the Montgomery County nonprofit Identity, Inc, found that the number one factor that influenced

¹ Maryland Department of Health, *Maryland Vital Statistics Annual Report, 2017*, p.75

<https://health.maryland.gov/vsa/Documents/Reports%20and%20Data/Annual%20Reports/2017annual.pdf>

² National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education (NCWGE). *Title IX at 40: Working to Ensure Gender Equity in Education*. Washington, DC: NCWGE, 2012. <https://www.ncwge.org/TitleIX40/Pregnant-Parenting.pdf>

³ Smithbattle, L., "I Wanna Have a Good Future": *Teen Mothers' Rise in Education Aspirations, Competing Demands, and Limited School Support*, YOUTH & SOC'Y (2007).

Latina and Latino youth in graduating from high school was the expectations of the adults around them that they actually would.⁴ It is currently unknown to what extent school climate in Maryland secondary schools affect pregnant and parenting students and prevent them from pursuing their education goals.

When students drop out of high school, it may become difficult to reenter and obtain a diploma. Nationally, young adults, particularly those from 20 to 29 years of age, who gave birth in their teens are less likely to hold a high school diploma or GED, relative to their peers who did not give birth.⁵⁶ Lower diploma and overall educational attainment impacts teenage parents as economic opportunities for these individuals become limited increasing the likelihood of poverty for both parent and child. Economic instability can continue to the next generation as two-thirds of families formed by teen mothers are poor, with nearly one in four enrolling in welfare benefits after the birth of the first child. It has been found that two-thirds of children born to minor parents earn high school diplomas as compared to 81% of their peers.⁷

Protections are afforded to pregnant and parenting students under Title IX; however, preliminary inquiries across Maryland's 24 school districts reveal that there are little resources or support available to such youth. Some childcare services are available at schools like the Ben Franklin High School (Baltimore City), The Teenage Parenting and Childcare program at Wilde Lake High School (Howard County), and the Annapolis Family Support Center. Additionally, it is unknown as the quality of education these students are receiving should they continue their education outside of a regular high school. Under Title IX, schools must allow pregnant or parenting students to choose whether they want to participate in special instructional programs or classes. A school cannot pressure or require a student to participate in an alternative program. Should one be available, the alternative program must provide the same types of academic, extracurricular, and enrichment opportunities as the student's former or regular program.⁸ **To be clear, pregnant and parenting students have the right to the same academic rigor as their non-pregnant or non-parenting peers.** This also means that they cannot and should not be pushed into GED programs. These students have the right to remain in the same school in which they were enrolled prior to the pregnancy. As there is little to no aggregated data regarding educational outcomes of pregnant and parenting youth in Maryland, it is necessary to collect such information to determine to what extent schools are providing equitable educational environments and what can be done to stop school pushout so that more students remain on track to graduate.

Realizing education goals is an important factor towards economic security and the ability to parent with dignity, in safety, and in good health. Many youth may not have the resources to navigate new parenthood alone, and school or community resources may provide critical assistance. It is imperative that we support these young people in their academic pursuits and give them the resources needed to raise their own healthy families; yet, to understand what accommodations are needed, outcomes and barriers must be known. It is not enough for adults to make assumptions and judgements about what youth should do when making life-affirming decisions about forming one's family – we have to meet youth where they actually are.

HB1201 establishes a two-year task force to assist school districts in identifying the most appropriate methodology, collect this much need data, determine barriers for these diploma-seeking students, and make recommendations to improve the educational outcomes of these youth. For these reasons, **NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges a favorable report on HB1201.** Thank you for your time and consideration.

⁴ Identity, Inc (2015) Connecting Youth to Opportunity: How Latino Youth Perspectives Can Inform a Blueprint for Improving Opportunity in Montgomery County, Maryland (June 2014) https://identity-youth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/hs-cyo-latinoyouth_report_pdf-final.pdf

⁵ Manlove, J. and Lantos, H. *Data Point: Half of 20- to 29-year-old women who gave birth in their teens have a high school diploma.* Child Trends. Bethesda, MD. 2018 <https://www.childtrends.org/half-20-29-year-old-women-gave-birth-teens-high-school-diploma>

⁶ Garcia, K, Chaudhry, N. (2017) *Let Her Learn: Stopping School Pushout for Girls Who Are Pregnant and Parenting.* National Women's Law Center. https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Final_nwlc_Gates_PregParenting.pdf

⁷ National Conference of State Legislatures, *Postcard: Teen Pregnancy Affects Graduation Rates*, 2013 <http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/teen-pregnancy-affects-graduation-rates-postcard.aspx>

⁸ U.S. Department of Education *Know Your Rights: Pregnant or Parenting? Title IX Protects You from Discrimination at School.* 8905 Fairview Road, Suite 401- Silver Spring, MD 20910 (301)565-4154 - www.prochoicemd.org