



SB0791 - County Boards of Education – Pregnant and Parenting Students – Policies and Reports

Presented to the Hon. Paul Pinsky and
Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 3, 2020 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee a favorable report on SB0791 - County Boards of Education – Pregnant and Parenting Students – Policies and Reports**, sponsored by Senator Clarence Lam.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice for all Marylanders. We work to ensure every child-bearing individual has the right to decide if, when, and how to form their families and to parent in good health, in safety, and with dignity. Youth have the same rights as adults in choosing when to form their families. Among our campaigns to ensure reproductive freedom for all Marylanders, we seek to help identify and create effective supports to help pregnant and parenting students stay in school and on track to graduate. Each year from 2014 to 2018, approximately 800 youth from ages 15 to 17 gave birth in Maryland, and roughly another 2,200 were 18 or 19 years-old. We currently have no information about their graduation rates. SB1000, the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future does not contain the words “pregnant” or “pregnancy” throughout the bill. 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. We seek to protect the rights of youth to feel safe at schools, free of gender-based harassment and harmful bias. We recognize that youth are better able to make informed and independent decisions about their own sexual and reproductive lives when free of gender discrimination and stereotypes.

Our state should ensure that any 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. SB0791 requires school districts to identify existing school personnel who can coordinate and secure available onsite or offsite resources for childcare, transportation, and lactation supports for pregnant and parenting youth. With guidance and assistance from the University of Maryland’s Institute of Innovation and Implementation, school districts will learn how to best collect data on the educational outcomes of pregnant and parenting youth, as well on the challenges they face to remain in school, resulting in a comprehensive, culminative report based upon at least three years of data.

Pregnant and parenting students may experience unwelcoming, inequitable, or stigmatizing school environments. Under Title IX, “school pushout” practices are prohibited, such as lack of accommodations for childcare and lactation, stigmatization and harassment from peers and staff, and involuntary leave from

school.¹ Title IX ensures that students who are pregnant or parenting are protected by allowing continued participation in classes and extracurricular activities, provide reasonable adjustments in the learning environment, authorize excused absences due to pregnancy or childbirth, and allow time to make up missed work childbirth (as was passed by the 2017 Maryland General Assembly through HB0616/SB0232). 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. Many pregnant and parenting students reported that they had no other choice by to attend an alternative school to continue their education.² These students reported that they failed to receive adequate instruction, and therefore felt disengaged from learning. Often times these alternative schools do not have the same variety of classes or offer advanced placement classes.³ According to the Advancement Project, pushout to alternative schools brings these students closer to the school to prison pipeline.⁴ In the National Women’s Law Center report, “Stopping School Pushout for: Girls Who Are Pregnant or Parenting,” more than 50% of female pregnant or parenting students were black and more than 60% were Latinx.⁵ Discrimination and push out interfering with a pregnant or parenting student’s authentic participation in school can lead to real threats of educational attainment and financial stability for generations⁶.

We are hopeful that in the spirit of the Kirwan Commission, the Maryland General Assembly will recognize the importance of pregnant and parenting youth being entitled to the same rigorous education as their non-pregnant and non-parenting peers. Not making the investments now, means that we have chosen to further marginalize these youth and the children they are committed to raise. For these reasons, **NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges a favorable committee report on SB791.** Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ U.S. Department of Education *Know Your Rights: Pregnant or Parenting? Title IX Protects You from Discrimination at School.*

² Clearing the Path: Creating School Success for Pregnant and Parenting Students and their children. Education Law Center. 2019

³ Monique W. Morris, African American Policy Forum, Race, Gender, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Expanding Our Discussion to Include Black Girls (2012).

⁴ Advancement Project. (2010) Test, Punish, and Push Out: How “Zero Tolerance” and High-Stakes Testing Funnel Youth Into the School-to-Prison Pipeline. Washington, DC.

⁵ Garcia, Kelli and Chaudhry, Neena. (2017). Stopping School Pushout for: Girls Who Are Pregnant or Parenting. National Women’s Law Center.

⁶ 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>