



SB0630 – Education – Adult High School Pilot Program -Funding and Grants

Presented to the Hon. Guy Guzzone and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 17, 2021 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to issue a **favorable report on SB0630 – Education – Adult High School Pilot Program -Funding and Grants**, sponsored by Senator Bill Ferguson.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. 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. Our organization seeks to help identify and create effective systems of support to help pregnant and parenting students stay in school, remain on track to graduate, and work towards economic security. In 2016, we testified in support of SB1173, which established a task force to determine how the state could best create adult high school pilot projects, to support students who dropped out or were pushed out of school, unable to obtain their diplomas with their cohorts, but committed to the goal of one day doing so.

In 2017, the Maryland General Assembly passed HB0616, which established excused absences for pregnant and parenting students for medical and legal reasons. HB0616 also clarified that although pregnancy is not an illness, it is a medical event that requires reasonable time off from school to address prenatal needs and postpartum recovery without being unfairly subjected to truancy allegations or school pushout. It essential that pregnant, expectant, and parenting students should have access to resources to support their both educational and parenting goals. A Gates Foundation study found that approximately half of female dropouts reported that pregnancy or becoming a parent played a role in their decisions to leave school¹. The same was true for almost one-third of male dropouts. These statistics can be attributed to “school pushout”; a phenomenon in which students feel so disenfranchised due to a lack of resources and support in their schools that they actually feel pressured to drop out². Captured in our state’s vital statistics is the fact that 2,645 teenagers under the age of 19 gave birth in Maryland in 2018³. We can speculate that among these 2,645 youth are students in need of additional resources to continue pursuing their education while likely parenting for the first time – as well as their co-parents.

While we currently have no information about graduation rates for Maryland pregnant, expectant, and parenting students, we know from speaking with former and current students, school faculty and staff, and community advocates that the potential wanes without proper resources or support. As we attempt to address

¹ National Women’s Law Center: A Pregnancy Test for Schools Report (2012).

² Don’t Get Pushed Out. Know Your Rights! Retrieved from <https://www.mdsuspensionrep.org/know-your-rights>

³ Power to Decide: The Campaign to End Unplanned Pregnancy (2018). Retrieved from <https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/national-state-data/maryland>

the lack of data collection on educational outcomes and how we can best address barriers to obtaining high school diplomas, we need to explore how we can recapture students in their adulthood that want to be back in school and on track to graduate. Under Title IX, these students share the same rights to opportunities for a rigorous education as their non-parenting peers.

Title IX guarantees students their full access to education without discrimination based on sex and gender, which includes pregnant, expectant and parenting youth. As we work to help guide and support school districts to create policies for schools to provide reasonable accommodations— like helping to make connections to childcare and transportation among existing community resources, as well as creating appropriate space to support lactation needs and excused time away from class to pump – there needs to be high schools to assist those that felt there was no alternative than to quit school and try again later.

We strongly urge that this SB0630 be passed this year, as it has come to our attention that better coordination of access to childcare resources for these students would have been very beneficial, and is still a serious problem, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The remote learning mandate has not only challenged working parents faced with scarce childcare options, but new parenting students struggling with caring for their own children while engaged in online learning – and also tasked with caring for other children that may be in the same household. Our organization contacted the 24 school districts in August and again in October to see what measures were being developed to assist these students with connecting them to childcare resources. Unfortunately, we are not aware of any school district that created a plan to assist these youth, and we greatly fear that Maryland will see a subsequent heightened school drop-out rate of this population of students as a result. The federal funding offered to the state mandated priority to working parents seeking childcare assistance, but not parenting students. Too many students already report challenges in applying for the childcare subsidies before the pandemic, finding the forms too complicated as well as the appeal process. Although there are regional navigation and childcare networks that exist, and are ready to assist these youth with seeking childcare centers and subsidies, but the connections need to be made. Lack of childcare is the number one reason why parenting students quit school. We fear that that parenting students in AY2021 will not be coming back. Anything we can do to increase the number of educational sites with wrap around support services and case management where people can obtain high school diplomas – no matter the reason why they left school – would be a great investment for the state.

Pregnant and parenting students often report having a renewed sense of commitment to their educational outcomes, knowing full well that high school diplomas will lead to better employment prospects in order to adequately care for the families they are forming. Under Title IX, these students deserve the support they need to achieve their educational goals. We must not leave them behind. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on bill SB0630**. Thank you for your time and consideration.