



SB0437 - Maryland Longitudinal Database System-Student Data – Pregnant and Parenting Students
Presented to the Honorable Paul Pinsky and
Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 25, 2021 11:00 a.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee to issue **a favorable report on SB0437 - Maryland Longitudinal Database System - Student Data - Pregnant and Parenting Students**, sponsored by Senator Mary Washington.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. Reproductive justice involves strengthening and expanding supportive environments so pregnant and parenting students can achieve their family formation goals while realizing their educational objective towards economic security. Additionally, both reproductive rights and educational equity movements call for improving the reporting mechanisms that accurately track and monitor the educational outcomes of pregnant and parenting youth, so that the state can continually work towards improvements in policies and practices that protect the rights of this population of students. These students deserve the same opportunity to a rigorous education as their non-parenting peers.

Maryland's public high schools reported a graduation rate of 86.6% in 2019, the lowest rate in recent years, attributing to thousands of students dropping out high school.¹ However, Maryland's public high schools reported that only 49 students formally withdrew during the previous academic year for "pregnancy" or "parenting" reasons.² Pregnant and parenting students who do not provide a reason for leaving school were categorized as "whereabouts unknown", of which there were 4,876 students in the 2017-18 school year.³ This data is inconsistent with national statistics, which show that only 40% of teen mothers finish high school, often leaving due to lack of support systems and resources. Additionally, nationwide, approximately 1/2 of female dropouts, and 1/3 of male dropouts say that becoming a parent was a factor in their decision to leave school.⁴ This represents a large percentage of pregnant, expectant, and parenting youth who are dropping out and unreported by school districts. If not appropriately addressed, this number will continue to grow.

With low state graduation rate and the large percentage of high school dropouts, we are concerned that this may indicate that pregnant and parenting youth are not receiving the necessary supports to graduate with their cohort. Establishing an indicator in the Maryland Longitudinal Database System will allow school

¹ Maryland Report Card. 2019 Progress Report.

https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/PrintReports/2019/StateReports/English/2019MDReportCard_ENG.pdf

² Summary of Attendance for Maryland Public Schools 2017-2018

<http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20172018Student/2018Attendance.pdf>

³ Summary of Attendance for Maryland Public Schools 2017-2018

<http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20172018Student/2018Attendance.pdf>

⁴ 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>

districts to specifically note pregnant and parenting status of students in order to record and track their educational outcomes. Data will be collected by school administrators and remain anonymous in the database system, ensuring the privacy of these youth in accurate data collection methods.

Maryland would not be the first state to track this data. The Wisconsin Department of Education received funding through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish an indicator for pregnant and parenting students in schools participating in their project. CDC project staff worked directly with school administrators to collect data that tracked the relationship between pregnant and parenting status and adverse health outcomes and educational fulfillment. While aggregated data was kept anonymous, information was collected via self-reporting from students in the participating school districts. A self-report methodology was utilized to ensure that students felt comfortable in reporting their pregnancy or parenting status to school administrators and ensured that the study did not violate any ethics in data collection. In this study particularly, it is important to note that information was collected on pregnancies rather than births in order to ensure that high-risk vulnerable students were identified in the earlier stages of pregnancy and subsequently able to receive the necessary support and resources.⁵ Including pregnancies rather than limiting the data solely to births is essential for Maryland to accurately track the number of pregnant and parenting youth at risk of dropping out and ensuring that anyone in need of resources can receive them as early as possible.

Finally, indicating pregnancy and/or parenting status of students in state reports will allow state and local leaders to continually prioritize policies that identify and address large gaps in educational equity and economic security. It will ensure that all students, regardless of their pregnant or parenting status can achieve their desired educational outcomes and achieve a higher standard of living, rather than feel pressured to drop-out or be pushed out of school.

For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0437**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

⁵ Wisconsin Department of Instruction InSPIRE Project. <https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/school-age-parent/inspire-grant>