



SB0438 - Public Schools - Pregnant and Parenting Students - Policies and Reports
Presented to the Hon. Paul Pinsky and
Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 25, 2021 11:00 a.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the Ways and Means Committee to issue a **favorable report on SB0438 - Public Schools - Pregnant and Parenting Students - Policies and Reports**, sponsored by Senator Mary Washington.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. As part of our efforts to protect reproductive freedom for all Marylanders, we work to ensure every child-bearing individual has the right to decide if, when, and how to form their families. We honor pregnancy in all its complexity. In doing so, we support pregnant and parenting youth as they navigate the challenges of building their families in good health, in safety, and with dignity.

It is essential that pregnant, expectant, and parenting students should have access to resources to support their both educational and parenting goals. A Gates Foundation national study found that approximately half of female dropouts say that pregnancy or becoming a parent played a role in their decisions to leave school.¹ 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 feel pressured to drop out.² Captured in our state’s vital statistics report is the fact that 2,645 teenagers under the age of 19 gave birth in Maryland in 2018.³ From this figure, we know that among these 2,645 youth, there are also students in need of additional resources to continue pursuing their education while parenting or co-parenting for the first time.

Multiple Supreme Court cases like *Griswald v. Connecticut* (1965) and *Roe v. Wade* (1973) affirm body autonomy and integrity as a critical component of the right to privacy. Body autonomy and integrity include pregnancy decision-making and family formation at whichever age or time in their life that someone may choose. NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland works to protect all Marylanders’ right to freely make reproductive health decisions, and Maryland students should not feel punished for making these, not always easy, decisions. They should feel supported by their school systems, which must be designed to help students achieve their goals

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>

towards economic security. This legislation seeks to address the real-life issues of navigating the demands of participating in school with parenthood, just as working parents do in their own employment sites.

Title IX guarantees students their full access to education without discrimination based on sex and gender which includes pregnant, expectant, and parenting youth. SB0438 calls for the school districts to create policies for schools to provide reasonable accommodations— like helping to make connections to childcare services and transportation among existing community resources, as well as creating a safe and private space to support lactation needs and excused time away from class to pump. Such measures allow students the same opportunities to realize their educational goals as their non-parenting peers. SB0438 is designed to increase and improve school attendance and participation and prevent school dropout due to pregnancy or parenting related needs and responsibilities.

Supportive training and guidance are also needed for school staff and personnel to offer pregnant, expectant, and parenting students appropriate support and guidance as well as information about their rights, such as the 2017 law Maryland establishing excused absences for medical and legal reasons related for pregnant and parenting students. Such measures allow students the same opportunities to a rigorous education as their non-parenting peers. Too often, pregnant and parenting students feel pushed out of their schools not only from the lack of educational accommodations available, but due to the bullying and harassment they face from both peers and teachers. Harassment of, or discrimination against a pregnant student is also considered a violation of federal law under Title IX and should be enforced as such in Maryland schools. SB0438 lays out the most helpful resources for this student population and how to protect their Title IX rights. The legislation also calls for policies and laws protecting the rights of pregnant, expectant, and parenting students be listed in the student handbook, and, hopefully, accessible online.

We strongly urge that this legislation 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 for youth, and is still a serious problem, especially 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. 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.

There is an immediate need to connect these youth to childcare now. The federal funding offered to the state mandated priority to working parents seeking childcare assistance, but not parenting students. There are some regional navigation and childcare networks that exist, and are ready to assist these youth, but the connections need to be made.

Having established policies and a liaison at each school to help identify and make connections to existing resources will benefit pregnant, expectant, and parenting students to plan accordingly on how to stay in school and on track to graduate, as well as when circumstances arise that make the balancing act of being both a parent and a student more difficult and/or challenging. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0438.** Thank you for your time and consideration.