



January 10, 2024

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chair, House Education and Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2462 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert “Bobby” Scott
Ranking Member, House Education and Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2328 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott,

We are a diverse group of advocates and experts dedicated to advancing civil rights protections and institutional resources for pregnant and parenting students. Students who are pregnant and/or parents deserve the opportunity to complete their education free from bias and harassment, in environments that support them on their educational journeys. Unfortunately, pregnant and parenting students are routinely stigmatized, discriminated against, and denied the resources, accommodations, and support they need to thrive in their educational institutions.¹

More than 5.4 million college students in the United States are parents, which is nearly one quarter of undergraduate students and nearly one third of graduate students.² Despite earning higher GPAs than non-parenting students,³ parenting college students are less likely to graduate.⁴ This is not due to personal failing, but rather a lack of institutional support and recognition of the unique barriers to college completion for parenting students.⁵ Pregnant and parenting students

¹ See, e.g., The Coalition for Pregnant and Parenting Students Advocacy, *Comment Regarding Proposed Title IX Regulations*, (Sept. 12, 2022), <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PPS-advocates-comment-9.12.22.pdf>

² Theresa Anderson and Autumn Green, Urban Institute, *Roadmap for Change to Support Pregnant and Parenting Students* (Dec. 30, 2022), <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/roadmap-change-support-pregnant-and-parenting-students>

³ Institute for Women’s Policy and Research, *Parents in College by the Numbers* (April 11, 2019), <https://iwpr.org/parents-in-college-by-the-numbers/>

⁴ Renee Ryberg, Rachel Rosenberg, Jessica Warren, *Higher Education Can Support Parenting Students and Their Children with Accessible and Equitable Services*, Child Trends (Jan. 2021), <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/higher-education-support-parenting-students-and-their-children>

⁵ See, e.g., Barbara Gault and Lindsey Reichlin Cruse, *Access to Child Care Can Improve Student Parent Graduation Rates* (2017), Inst. for Women’s Pol’y & Res. (May 2017), <https://iwpr.org/access-to-child-care-can-improve-student-parent-graduation-rates/>

often experience feeling disconnected from the larger education community and are not aware of who they can speak to when they experience discrimination because of their pregnancy or parenting status.⁶

This latest bill to “protect the rights of pregnant students” falls far short of the protections that are actually necessary for pregnant and parenting students and their children. The [Pregnant Students’ Rights Act](#) is a thinly veiled anti-abortion law which would not address the key barriers to pregnant students’ educational attainment, and instead would further shame and stigmatize people for their pregnancy outcomes.

The proposed bill relies on anti-abortion language and seeks to limit students’ reproductive healthcare decisions. This type of language is part of a deliberate strategy by the anti-abortion movement to further legal grounds for a national abortion ban now that the Supreme Court has overturned the constitutional right to abortion care as established in *Roe v. Wade*. Furthermore, the bill language contrasts with existing legal protections for pregnant students experiencing a range of outcomes related to their pregnancies.

Our belief in personal autonomy and respect for every person’s capacity to make their own decisions—including whether to continue their pregnancy or not—is at the core of our work to support pregnant and parenting students. This bill does not contain any **meaningful supports**⁷ that would actually help pregnant and parenting students be able to remain enrolled and meet their educational goals.

Such supports are critically needed, and include:

- Strengthened Title IX protections
- Nondiscrimination protections at the state and local level
- Accessible and affordable child care, and increased funding for on-campus child care
- Access to early education and pre-kindergarten services
- Transportation access
- Basic needs security (including food, housing, clothing, etc.)
- Flexible school attendance policies
- Lactation accommodations
- Less stigma and shame around young parenthood
- Increased accountability measures for institutions who fail to protect pregnant and parenting students
- Federal funding to support campus Title IX offices' work to prevent and investigate discrimination against pregnant students
- Mandatory data collection on students’ parenting statuses

⁶ Generation Hope, *National Student Parent Survey Results and Recommendations* (May 2020), <https://www.generationhope.org/student-parents-report-2020>

⁷ The Urban Institute, in collaboration with a cross-sectoral Leadership Council, has developed a roadmap of opportunities to improve practice, policy, research, and investment to support pregnant and parenting students and their families. See <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/roadmap-change-support-pregnant-and-parenting-students>

Strides toward these meaningful supports are in progress. We applaud, for example, Representatives Lucy McBath and Deborah Ross’s recent introduction of the [Understanding Student Parent Outcomes Act of 2023](#), which would allow essential data collection on the barriers to college graduation for pregnant and parenting students. But sweeping legislation is necessary to ensure that pregnant and parenting students and their families are protected.

Although pregnant and parenting students face many roadblocks, they can thrive when their educational institutions listen to them, support them, and prevent discrimination against them. While balancing their health, caregiving responsibilities,⁸ and educational goals is challenging, these added responsibilities often renew students’ dedication to their studies.⁹ While the decision to parent and/or continue pregnancy is a personal one, the barriers that pregnant and parenting students face are not. This proposed bill would reinforce structural and institutional bias and scrutiny of the decisions students make regarding their personal lives.

We welcome the opportunity to have an open dialogue with the sponsors of the “Pregnant Students’ Rights Act” and with any other members of Congress who are ready to step up as the champion that pregnant and parenting students in our nation need and deserve.

Sincerely,

The Coalition for Pregnant and Parenting Students Advocacy:

A Better Balance
Generation Hope
Healthy Teen Network
Institute for Women’s Policy Research
Justice and Joy National Collaborative
National Women’s Law Center
New America Higher Education Program
Pregnant Scholar Initiative at the Center for WorkLife Law

Joined by:

Advocates for Youth
American Association of University Women
American Civil Liberties Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Humanist Association
BreastfeedLA
California Women’s Law Center
Center for Freethought Equality

⁸ See Generation Hope, *The Child Care Barrier: The Impacts of Inaccessible and Costly Child Care for Student Parents* (2023), <https://www.generationhope.org/child-care-report-2023-download>

⁹ Nat’l Women’s Law Ctr., *Let Her Learn: Stopping Pushout For Girls Who are Pregnant or Parenting*, 1, (2017) <https://nwlc.org/resources/stopping-school-pushout-for-girls-who-are-pregnant-or-parenting/>

Center for Reproductive Rights
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Colorado Teen Parent Collaborative
End Rape On Campus
Family Equality
Feminist Majority Foundation
Guttmacher Institute
Harvard Law School
Ipas
League of Women Voters of the United States
Legal Momentum, The Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy and Community Empowerment
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women's Political Caucus
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Positive Women's Network-USA
Power to Decide
Reproductive Freedom for All (formerly NARAL Pro-Choice America)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Stop Sexual Assault in Schools
The Hope Center at Temple University
Union for Reform Judaism
Women of Reform Judaism
Won't She Do It