

**COALITION FOR PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS ADVOCACY**

Re: The Helping Student Parents Succeed Act

December 10, 2024

Representative Lucy McBath  
2246 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Colin Allred  
348 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives McBath and Allred,

The [Coalition for Pregnant and Parenting Students Advocacy](#) is a diverse group of advocates and experts dedicated to advancing civil rights protections and institutional resources for pregnant and parenting students. We applaud the introduction of the [Helping Student Parents Succeed Act](#), which would ensure students expecting a child and student parents are made aware of child care, leave options, and other accommodations that are available to them at their schools. We believe that investing in student parent success has a positive and far-reaching multiplier effect for the student parent, their family, and our larger community.

One in five undergraduate students across the United States are parents, and hundreds of thousands of students become pregnant each year. This bill will benefit both pregnant and parenting students as well as their children. Families thrive when parents can access all the available resources needed to care for themselves and their children.

Student parents comprise a diverse population of dedicated learners who [earn better grades](#) on average than nonparents. Their success is critical to advancing equity on campus and beyond. Further, student parent success immediately benefits families, communities, and the economy. Pregnant, postpartum, and parenting students who complete their degrees have [higher lifetime earnings](#). Parents' education level is a strong predictor of their children's success. A \$3,000 increase in a parent's income leads to a 17% increase in their [child's future income](#).

Ensuring that students are informed about their educational institution's policies regarding leaves of absence, lactation accommodations, financial aid eligibility, child care availability, housing for students with dependents, and student support services is an important step in addressing the systemic barriers that can keep pregnant and parenting students from graduating.

As advocates, we frequently work with students who have not been fully informed about their rights and available resources. Many pregnant students risk their health, and the health of their pregnancies, because they are unaware of their right to accommodations to keep them safe. Further, without knowledge of their leave options, rights to accommodations, and financial aid eligibility, many pregnant and parenting students face roadblocks that needlessly interrupt their education.

Appropriate modifications ensure that students are able to complete their studies, and notification of the modifications process makes it easier for students to access the changes they need—reducing interruption of their education. With leaves of absence, for example, it is imperative that pregnant students be informed about their right under Title IX to take time off and be reinstated to their prior status. Without this information, students report scheduling inductions of labor to avoid missing class, returning to school while recovering or experiencing severe complications, and even taking exams while in the hospital. Many students who aren't able to take these extraordinary actions to continue their education are needlessly failed or kicked out of their programs when they are unable to arrange protected time off.

We applaud the bill's inclusion of a requirement to adopt leave policies, so that students can better understand their rights and plan for absences in advance. To ensure this provision is a helpful addition to existing law, we encourage the bill's authors to specify that the leave of absence policy required by Section 1 must, at minimum, allow for students to take as much time as medically necessary, after which they shall be returned to the same academic status. As has long been required by Title IX, that includes making sure students are not academically penalized for absences, and have fair access to make up work. Students should also be made aware of how a mid-semester leave of absence can affect their academic progress and potential financial aid eligibility, as well as modifications that may serve as alternatives to leave and steps they can take to minimize potential challenges.

In the absence of clear information and instructions, some pregnant students informally drop out of school without taking proper steps to withdraw or go on leave; this can saddle new parents with great amounts of debt and no degree to show for it. To address this problem, we suggest that the bill include a requirement that institutions develop and make available a policy outlining students' **Right to Withdraw**. All students benefit from having clear notice about the withdrawal process, but it is especially important for pregnant and parenting students to have this information.

Additionally, for section (5), which provides that institutions will provide a policy containing information on “available student support services, programs, and community resources,” including “other services available for expectant and parenting students, both on-campus and in the community, and under local, State, and Federal law,” we caution that there should be parameters in place to assess these services, programs, and resources. Anti-abortion facilities known as [“crisis pregnancy centers” \(CPCs\)](#) advertise themselves as pregnancy resource centers, but operate unethically and with the intention to dissuade, deter, or prevent people expecting a child from seeking certain reproductive health care options, including abortion and birth control. Pregnant and parenting students should have access to comprehensive, evidence-based, nonjudgmental health care and information from qualified professionals, regardless of whether they decide to continue a pregnancy or seek abortion care.

Families and whole societies thrive when student parents and pregnant students graduate on time and succeed in their education. Colleges and universities will increase overall degree attainment by meeting student parents' basic needs including accessible and affordable child care, increased funding for on-campus child care, access to quality early childhood education, transportation, food, lactation accommodations, housing, clothing, mental health services, and more.

The Helping Student Parents Succeed Act is an excellent step in the right direction. We look forward to supporting and strengthening this legislation to bolster support across systems of higher education for pregnant and parenting students and their families.

Sincerely,

The Coalition for Pregnant and Parenting Students Advocacy:

A Better Balance  
American Association of University Women  
Colorado Teen Parent Collaborative  
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  
Public Scholar  
The Institute for College Access & Success  
UNITE-LA  
Won't She Do It