

# 2024 National and State **Policy and Advocacy Agenda**



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## PURPOSE OF THE AGENDA

Each year, Generation Hope creates a National and State Policy and Advocacy Agenda to accompany our [overarching policy priorities](#) curated from student parents' lived experiences, research, and our direct work with families. We outline the actions we will take to reach our goals, centering student-parent voices and experiences every step of the way. In 2024, we are committed to furthering our impact nationwide and within states, and the District of Columbia, by engaging in policy and advocacy work to support student parent success. We do this in partnership with student parents and policy leaders across the country.

## DEFINITIONS

- **Student parent:** refers to a student of any gender who is a parent or assumes caregiving responsibilities of any biological, adopted, step, or foster child(ren) living in their household, part- or full-time. We also include pregnant and expecting students in this group.
- **National:** refers to the extent to which an organization or entity is recognized, active, and influential on a country-wide scale. It involves having a significant impact on national policies, public opinion, and decision-making processes.
  - **Indicators:**
    - **Policy & Advocacy:** The organization actively engages in advocating for its policy priorities at the national level.
    - **Media Coverage:** The organization receives coverage in national media, indicating its visibility and influence.
    - **Collaborations:** Partnerships with national-level stakeholders, government bodies, and other influential entities.
    - **Public Awareness:** The organization's policy priorities are well-known among the general public at the national level.
- **State:** refers to the degree of influence, engagement, and recognition that an organization has across a specific state or region within the state. It involves targeting policies and issues relevant to that particular state's context.
  - **Indicators:**
    - **Policy & Advocacy:** Active involvement in advocating for policy priorities at the state level.
    - **Legislative Engagement:** Participation in state-level legislative processes and interactions with lawmakers.
    - **Community Outreach:** Engagement with local communities, grassroots organizations, and state-level stakeholders.
    - **Regional Media Coverage:** Coverage in state or regional media highlighting the organization's activities and priorities.



## OUR MISSION

To ensure all student parents have the opportunities to succeed, experience economic mobility, and build wealth, Generation Hope engages education and policy partners to drive systemic change and directly supports teen parents in college and their children through holistic, two-generation programming.

## OUR VISION

All teen parents and student parents, and their children, have every opportunity to succeed and are empowered to create a better future for themselves, our community, and our world.

## GENERATION HOPE MOVING THE NEEDLE

In 2023, Generation Hope published several timely [reports](#) on the unique challenges faced by students who are raising young children while attending college, increased our advocacy efforts, trained student parents on self-advocacy, hosted and participated in a variety of policy-related events, worked with partners and lawmakers to influence policy that impacts student parents, and amplified student-parent voices to affect lasting change. **To learn more about our recent accomplishments, check out [Generation Hope's 2023 Policy and Advocacy Recap](#).**

### WE'RE EXPANDING OUR IMPACT

Along with many wins for families in 2023, after 13 years of successfully serving young parents in college (i.e. Scholars) across the Washington, D.C. region, we expanded our direct-service work to [New Orleans, Louisiana](#). In our first year, we are serving 25 student-parent Scholars in this new community, and we look forward to deepening our work and delivering targeted programming to help young families there succeed and experience economic mobility.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO RACE EQUITY

Generation Hope believes in the **promise, power, and ability** of people of color to create a better future for themselves, our community, and our world. Since its founding, America has institutionalized barriers based on race that have made it difficult or impossible for people of color to access the information and resources they need to thrive across generations. We know that these barriers, and their impacts, are still being reinforced today.

Generation Hope remains steadfast in our commitment to fostering student parent success in higher education and beyond, urging federal, state, and institutional policymakers to join us.

## STUDENT PARENT BACKGROUND

Despite the fact that more than one in five college students in the United States are raising children while attending school, parenting students remain primarily unseen and underserved by higher education institutions, data analysts, and policymakers across the country (14). As this population grows, policymakers at every level must understand their specific needs and invest in student-parent work.

Student parent success is a matter of social and racial justice. In the U.S., the higher education attainment of millions of parents is impacted by the intersection of their parenting status with other identities and experiences, including race, ethnicity, immigration status, socioeconomic status, sexuality, gender identity, faith, and more. They are also more likely to be students of color and come from low-income backgrounds than their non-parenting peers.

# HIGHER EDUCATION AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Parenting students are driven to succeed in higher education and tend to have higher GPAs than their non-parenting peers (14). Still, the economic impact of paying for a college degree on top of day-to-day caregiving costs takes a heavy toll and can interfere with their ability to complete their degree programs. The focus must be on affordability and access to higher education, and individual and institutional competencies to create family-friendly campus environments and implement policies and supports that improve student parent success.

**To lead policy dialogue and change for affordability and accessibility of higher education for student parents in 2024 at the national and state levels, Generation Hope will:**

## NATIONAL IMPACT

- **Support federal policies that ease the economic burden for student parents by increasing financial aid support or by partially or entirely forgiving student loans.** Nationwide, 34% of undergraduate students receive a Pell Grant, and more than half (51%) of Pell Grant funds go to students whose families earn less than \$20,000 annually (10). Generation Hope will advocate for [changes to the Pell Grant initiative](#) that further mitigate the burden of loans for parenting students, including increasing maximum award amounts, establishing short-term Pell Grants for students attending programs that last less than 15 weeks, and the [Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students \(JOBS\) Act](#), a non-partisan bill that aims to enhance opportunities for students and workers seeking additional training or advancement in their careers. It proposes to make federal Pell Grants available for high-quality, shorter-term education and training programs, thereby expanding access to job training initiatives.
- **Endorse legislation that provides more clarity on the actual cost of higher education and student outcomes, such as enrollment, completion, and post-college earnings** to help students make decisions that do not put their economic security at risk. The lifetime median return on investment (ROI) for the average bachelor's degree is 287.7%; however, data shows that bachelor's degree holders do not begin to see returns until they have worked full-time for 15 years (9). Generation Hope will encourage support for the [College Transparency Act](#) to improve the information available to students and their families as they consider higher education opportunities.
- **Advocate for developing and implementing federal student-parent data collection initiatives** to spread awareness about the needs and experiences of a population often unseen and underserved by lawmakers. Although the FAFSA does provide valuable data, it lacks questions directly asking about parenting status and is not submitted by every potential student in the country. Only 57% of high school graduates from the class of 2021 completed a FAFSA (19). Therefore, it does not offer comprehensive insights. Generation Hope will convene and engage stakeholders to encourage their investment in initiatives to collect data and utilize it in ways that lead to better outcomes for student parents.
- **Promote racial equity by supporting policies and practices that combat barriers to success disproportionately experienced by people of color in higher education settings.** Recent research on “Racial and ethnic equity in US higher education” states that only 8% of higher education institutions in the United States provide fair representation for students from underrepresented populations and help them graduate at the same rate as the overall U.S. undergraduate population (5). In light of last year's [Supreme Court ruling on restricting race-conscious admissions](#), Generation Hope will continue working to eliminate racial disparities and hardships that impact student parents' lives, academic success, and economic mobility.



# STATE IMPACT

- **Support state legislation and institutional policies that seek to ease the burdens experienced by parenting students and enable them to earn postsecondary degrees.** Parenting students whose time is consumed with multiple responsibilities often experience time poverty, which impacts their personal and academic well-being.<sup>1</sup> Last year, we surveyed our Scholars and found that nearly three-fourths reported having a job, with 55% working more than 20 hours per week and attending school part- or full-time and parenting (16). Generation Hope will encourage the creation of laws and policies that increase the number of student parents who make it across the graduation stage, including [mandating priority registration](#) for parenting students, [requiring institutions to hire staff members to serve as student-parent liaisons](#), increasing Title IX supports and accommodations, and more. Our ongoing collaborations with a diverse and growing cohort of higher education institutions around the country through our [FamilyU technical assistance program](#) allows us to support change and positively impact the lives of student parents and their families.
- **Champion and support state legislation requiring data collection on students' parenting statuses** to ensure that politicians, community leaders, and higher education administrators can understand parenting college students' needs and experiences. Only a few states have passed bills requiring higher education institutions to collect and track student-parent data, including [Oregon](#), [Illinois](#), and [California](#). When legislators and institutional leaders understand student parents' demographics, needs, and outcomes, they can offer support and resources that help them thrive. Generation Hope will collaborate with partners on the ground to support student-parent data collection efforts.
  - In Maryland, where we currently serve 96 student-parent Scholars, we are working with a coalition of partners to champion legislation requiring higher education institutions to collect data on student parents. Generation Hope will organize legislative and grassroots advocacy efforts as the bill moves through the state legislature in the next session, highlighting student-parent voices.
- **Assist college and university policy leaders in creating family-friendly campus environments.** More than one-third of student parents surveyed by the Urban Institute in 2019 had not observed any family-friendly campus components at their colleges. Among students of color, 45% reported no family-friendly components (8). Generation Hope will encourage colleges and universities across the country to invest in student parent success by creating family-friendly study rooms and lactation spaces on campus, guaranteeing on-campus parking spots for young parents, strengthening Title IX support for students, improving basic needs access for students, establishing family-friendly housing initiatives for undergraduate students, and working to create widespread educational opportunities for student parents.



1. Time poverty is a condition that reduces the quantity and quality of time student parents can spend on their studies. See (16) for more information on how student parents are impacted by time poverty.

# CHILD CARE AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Earning a college degree can profoundly impact the lives of student parents and their children. However, access to affordable, high-quality child care is critical to reaching this goal. The cost of child care in the United States has increased by 220% over the last three decades, and families across the country are struggling to find and afford quality care (6). Without access to this critical resource, student parents may be forced to pause or discontinue their education.

To lead policy dialogue for the accessibility of quality, reliable, and affordable child care for student parents in 2024 at the national and state levels, Generation Hope will:

## NATIONAL IMPACT

- **Support policy improvements for child care accessibility for parenting students by advocating for more federal funding for on-campus providers that meet families' needs.** Through our direct service work with parenting students, we found that 1 in 3 struggle to find available spots in their preferred child care (16). At its current funding level, the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program can only cover care costs for fewer than 100,000 student parents in the United States — a fraction of the nearly 4 million total undergraduate students who are parents (15). Generation Hope encourages further investment in the CCAMPIS program, prioritizing funding for child care at community colleges and minority-serving institutions (MSIs), where the largest share of student parents can be found, when allocating this funding (14).
- **Defend and promote policy improvements for reducing financial burdens for families by strengthening the Child Care & Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program and making it easier for them to access CCDBG.** This critical program supports 1.5 million children and their families monthly with childcare assistance (23). However, access could be improved by simplifying enrollment processes, easing paperwork burdens, and encouraging states to make siblings of children who already receive the subsidy presumptively eligible for benefits. Generation Hope will collaborate with partners to support policies that strengthen the CCDBG program and improve access for all families.
- **Champion and advocate for policy efforts to establish guidelines for the cost of child care and close the affordability gap.** According to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), child care is considered affordable when it costs no more than 7% of a family's income; however, only 14 states have set copayment rates for families participating in CCDBG at or below this threshold (23 & 22). HHS estimates that between 2005 and 2021, the average family copayment for child care increased by nearly 20%, and almost 80,000 families nationwide would see their childcare payments reduced due to a 7% copayment cap (22). Generation Hope will keep pressure on federal lawmakers to follow through with their [promise to lower the cost of child care](#) and advocate for federal policies that ease the financial burden of child care on student parents, including the [Child Care for Working Families Act](#).







## STATE IMPACT

- **Defend and rally for the reduction of barriers to accessing child care by advocating for expanding state-level child care subsidy programs and ensuring there are enough providers to serve those eligible to participate.** In fiscal year 2019, the Child Care Subsidy Program in Washington, D.C., provided subsidy payments directly to providers serving more than 5,000 infants and toddlers and over 4,000 local children ages three to five (3). Although everyone eligible can participate in the program, more providers are needed in the area to meet the needs of low-income families. In collaboration with partners on the ground around the country, Generation Hope will support legislation that increases funding for child care subsidy programs in the states and the District of Columbia.
  - In Virginia, where we currently serve 36 student-parent Scholars, 97% of families cannot afford childcare tuition (24).
  - In Maryland, where we currently serve 96 student-parent Scholars, the average cost of center-based child care for a toddler in 2021 was \$11,090, which is nearly 8% of the median income of a married couple and 25% of a single mother's income in the state (18).
  - In Louisiana, where we currently serve 25 student-parent Scholars in the New Orleans area, infant care in a center costs more than \$8,700 annually — almost as much as public college tuition (17).
- **Campaign and advocate for the diversification and improvement of child care options available to families by urging public and private child care policy leaders to strengthen the infrastructure for home-based child care.** Over the last decade, the number of home-based child care providers in the United States has declined by 25% (21). Generation Hope will work with advocates and childcare providers across the country to remove barriers to entry for potential providers, including increasing access to start-up and expansion capital, streamlining onerous paperwork processes, and paying caregivers fair salaries.

# TRUE PATHWAYS TO ECONOMIC MOBILITY

At Generation Hope, we believe in a future where every parent can follow their dreams and give their children what they need to thrive. Parents pursue college degrees with aspirations of subsequently starting a career, earning family-sustaining wages, and building generational wealth. But for many young parents who may be experiencing the realities of housing and food insecurity, systemic inequities, and bureaucratic barriers, obtaining a postsecondary degree is an uphill battle. Workforce policy advocacy is not only about addressing immediate challenges but also about creating an ecosystem that fosters sustained economic mobility.

To lead policy dialogue for actual pathways to economic mobility for student parents in 2024, Generation Hope will:

## NATIONAL IMPACT

- **Advocate for policy leaders to create more supportive environments for parenting students navigating quality career and workforce attainment.** The unemployment rate for individuals with a bachelor's degree is 5.5%, which is only 22.5% lower than the overall national unemployment rate. Lawmakers can and should do more to ensure students can succeed in school and find employment with family-sustaining wages after graduation (9). Generation Hope will support policies that increase opportunities for parenting students to find quality careers, including increased work-study opportunities for students, recognition of prior learning, flexible scheduling from employers and prospective employers, strengthened workforce anti-discrimination measures, raising the federal minimum wage, and affordable child care for workers.
- **Rally for and uphold increased access to [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) benefits** for student parents, as many are navigating hardships purchasing food for themselves and their families and staying in school. Currently, 57% of college students who are eligible for SNAP are not accessing it, compared to 18% of the general population (13). Parenting college students experience much higher rates of food insecurity than those without children — nearly one in five (19%) parenting students report experiencing food insecurity, compared to only 15% of the general student population (4). Generation Hope will support bills like the [EATS Act](#) that permanently expand SNAP eligibility for parenting college students.
- **Encourage lawmakers to institute permanent federal emergency aid funding for college students.** The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the diverse challenges faced by parenting students, and Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) money helped, but problems persist today. More than half (51%) of student mothers report financial difficulty handling an emergency such as a broken car or a medical bill (12). Students who received emergency aid during the pandemic are also twice as likely to graduate or persist in their degree programs than those who did not receive aid (1). Generation Hope will remind lawmakers of the return on investment from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) and support legislation that permanently establishes [economic aid for students in emergency situations](#).<sup>2</sup>
- **Advocate for all student parents having equal opportunities to succeed regardless of immigration status by advocating for permanent legislative protection for [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#) recipients.** In the United States, 94% of DACA recipients have high school diplomas and 36% are parents (7). DACA recipients are more likely to find jobs with family-sustaining wages and better working conditions that fit their training and education (25). Generation Hope will support legislation establishing permanent protections for DACA recipients/DREAMers and their families, including the [Dream Act](#) and the [American Dream and Promise Act](#).

2. Many student parents face financial barriers that can hinder their ability to pursue and complete a college education. Emergency aid funding can help alleviate immediate financial crises, such as unexpected medical expenses, housing issues, or transportation problems, which might otherwise force students to drop out. By providing emergency aid funding, lawmakers can help ensure that student parents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds have equal access to education.



# STATE IMPACT

- **Identify and mitigate barriers that impact student fathers on their paths to and through higher education,** especially Black, Indigenous, and Latino fathers. A 2019 report from the Institute of Women's Policy Research (14) indicated that 61% of student fathers stop out of college before earning their degree (compared to 48% of student mothers) and that the stop-out rate increases to 72% and 66% when looking specifically at Black and Latino student fathers, respectively. Generation Hope will work with policy leaders and stakeholders to combat persistent gender, cultural, and racial stereotypes and stigmas that contribute to the overall invisibility of student fathers and inform local institutions and policymakers on how they can better support young fathers in pursuit of economic mobility for themselves and their families.
- **Advocate for the expansion of in-state tuition and in-state aid for undocumented students** to increase access to higher education and disrupt the cycle of poverty. We know that student parents are more likely to be Black and Hispanic, and many are immigrants and first-generation students. Currently, at least 15 states offer state financial aid to students who meet specific criteria, regardless of their immigration status, and about 84% of the nation's foreign-born population live in these states (20).<sup>3</sup> Generation Hope will support state-level policies that help students afford the rising cost of higher education, regardless of their immigration statuses.
  - In Louisiana, where we currently serve 25 student-parent Scholars in the New Orleans area, no comprehensive policies extend in-state tuition to undocumented college students. There are currently more than 57,000 undocumented immigrants in the state, many of whom are young parents unable to access higher education (11).
- **Advocate for and defend the importance of access to social capital, mentorship, and robust personal/professional networks** in a student's journey to succeed in higher education, earn family-sustaining wages, and experience economic mobility.<sup>4</sup> Race is a critical and consistent differentiator of social networks, as research has shown that white women have the most extensive networks, followed by white men, Latinas, Black women, and Black men (2). Higher education institutions must bolster opportunities for students to expand and diversify their networks because outside of family, job, education, and housing, networks are primarily formed through work, education settings, and community activities (2). Generation Hope will partner with internal and external research teams to evaluate the role of mentoring in building student parents' social capital, especially in facilitating personally and professionally strengthened economic social networks.



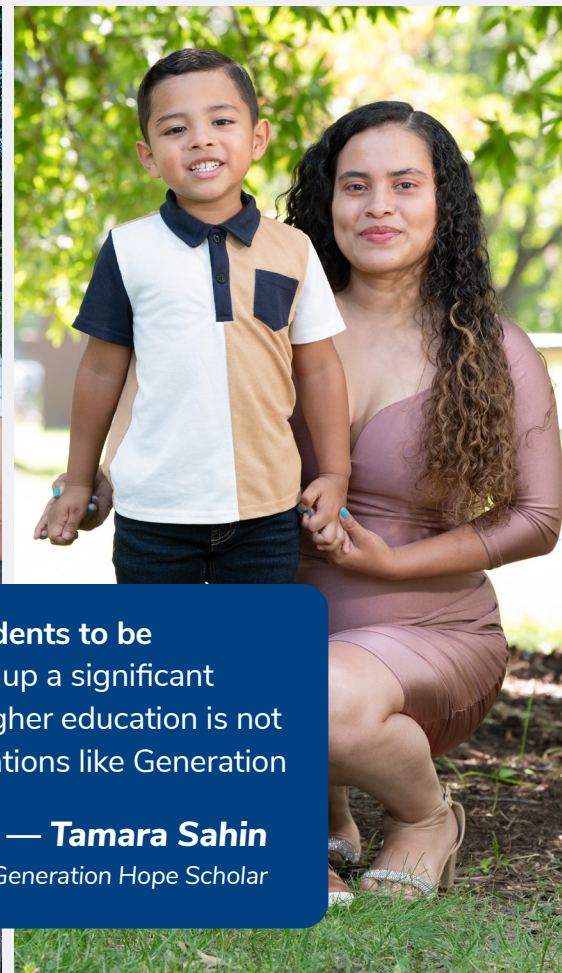
3. States that currently offer financial aid to students regardless of their immigration status include California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, and Washington, as well as the District of Columbia. California, Connecticut, Minnesota, and Utah allow public universities to offer private institutional aid or scholarships to students who pay in-state rates or graduate from their high schools, regardless of their immigration status. Utah established the Access Utah Promise Scholarship, which consolidates various scholarship programs. The University of Hawaii also offers financial assistance to eligible students, regardless of their immigration status.

4. Generation Hope defines social capital as the strength of a student's relationships that provide support, information and opportunity. This can include social and digital networks. There is no universal definition for this term.



# POWER-BUILDING WITH STUDENT PARENTS

At Generation Hope, we believe in the power of centering the voices of student parents — especially student parents of color — and know that they are the best advocates for themselves. We elevate their experiences in our advocacy efforts as we seek to change institutional and public policies that impact their lives and families, spreading awareness about what student parents experience and destigmatizing young parenthood in higher education settings. We are dedicated to championing parenting students' powerful stories and illuminating their experiences and expertise as we disrupt and reform oppressive policies and support proactive measures to create large-scale and sustainable systems change. Our overarching policy framework reflects student parents' priorities as paramount to their success, and these 2024 focus areas build upon that input. Generation Hope's advocacy will always reflect our deep commitment to race equity as it guides our internal and external work.



**“I believe that Generation Hope is paving the way for parenting students to be collectively recognized in higher education settings. Despite making up a significant portion of college students, student parents are underrepresented. Higher education is not structured to support the needs of student parents. We need organizations like Generation Hope to provide a platform and voice for parenting students.”**

**— Tamara Sahin**

*A member of Generation Hope's 2024 Student Parent Advocacy Alliance and a Generation Hope Scholar*



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## ABOUT GENERATION HOPE

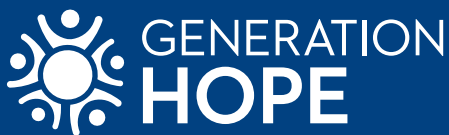
Founded in 2010, Generation Hope is a nonprofit organization that engages education and policy partners to drive systemic change and provides direct support to teen parents in college (i.e. Scholars) as well as their children through holistic, two-generation programming to ensure all student parents have the opportunities to to succeed, experience economic mobility, and build wealth. We engage in local and national advocacy work, amplifying the student-parent voice and centering their experiences. We also leverage our data and best practices to serve as a thought partner to colleges, providing them with the tools, resources, and support that they need to implement programs, adjust policies, and change structures and culture to improve outcomes for student parents.

To date, our Scholar Program has served 435 teen parents in college and celebrated 172 degrees. We currently serve 200 Scholars in the D.C. metro region and New Orleans area. We have also worked with more than 30 colleges and universities to enhance their student parent work through our technical assistance program, FamilyU, impacting nearly 100,000 student parents across the country. Find out more at [generationhope.org](http://generationhope.org).

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**To get involved in current and future policy efforts,  
please contact [policy@generationhope.org](mailto:policy@generationhope.org).**

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