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House Bill 3003 (Talarico): Relating to the designation of liaison officers at public institutions of higher education to assist certain students who are parents.

NAMI Texas is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization founded by volunteers in 1984. We are part of the nation's largest grassroots mental health organizations and we exist to help improve the quality of life for individuals with mental illness and their families. Around the state, we have 27 local NAMI affiliate organizations and approximately 2,000 members.

NAMI Texas supports strategies to address social determinants of mental health and reduce generational poverty.

NAMI Texas strongly supports this bill because supporting students who are parents graduate reduces poverty and other stressors that overall harm a family's health and well-being

The demographics on college campuses are changing, and more parents of young children are enrolling in higher education.

- One in four Texas students are raising children while attending college.¹
- Over 62 percent of student parent mothers are raising their children alone.¹
- In 2016, almost half of all higher education enrollments were at community colleges.¹

These students face many challenges to staying well and completing college.

- Only one third of student parents attain a degree or certificate within 6 years of enrollment compared to 56 percent of dependent students.¹ Each additional child reduces a student parent's chances of completing their degree by approximately 50 percent.¹
- Two thirds of student parents surveyed in Texas reported missing school due to child care reasons, citing lack of child care options on campus as a barrier to college success.¹
- Student parents are more likely to be employed and working longer hours, both factors that decrease a student's likelihood of graduating.¹
- Young parents are less likely to have health insurance, which has a negative impact on their health and well-being.^{1,2}
- **Women on Medicaid in Texas aged 20–24 have nearly twice the rate of postpartum depression than women over 35 years of age.** Untreated mental health issues can make it more difficult to complete their degree.¹

By providing liaisons to help student parents with what they need to graduate, we are helping them take care of themselves and their families, maintain self-sufficiency, and improve their quality of life.

NAMI Texas also supports this bill specifically for its inclusion of mental health resources.

Students with mental health issues, especially students who are mothers, may not know how to identify when they are experiencing mental health issues such as perinatal depression or how to seek out help. This liaison would provide resources on how to access mental health services and open up the conversation on seeking these services when needed.

Mental health issues are more common with low-income and younger mothers in Texas.

- Around half of parenting teens and low-income mothers experience depressive symptoms.³
- Over half of women with perinatal depression are not diagnosed.³
- Thirty-seven percent of low-income mothers with young children who experience a major depressive disorder do not receive any kind of mental health treatment.³

Without treatment, mental health disorders can impact the entire family.

- At least one third of adults with a substance use disorder in Texas also have a mental health disorder.⁴
- Women with untreated perinatal depression are four times more likely to visit the emergency room and have 90 percent higher health care costs.³
- Almost 9 percent of maternal deaths were due to suicide, and 85 percent of these deaths occurred more than 60 days postpartum.⁵
- **Drug overdose accounted for 17 percent of all maternal deaths, and almost 80 percent of these deaths that occurred more than 60 days postpartum.⁵**

Mental health disorders such as perinatal depression can be highly treatable, but the first step is ensuring pregnant women and mothers at risk know how to access affordable treatment and support if they begin experiencing depressive symptoms. This bill would start the process of helping student parents in need access academic, health, and service resources they need to stay in school and succeed.

Resources

1. Galasso, F., Harris, A., Sasser-Bray, E. (2018). Student Parents and Health Care in Texas: Understanding and Elevating Their Needs. Young Invincibles.
2. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018). Opening Doors for Young Parents. Kids Count Policy Report.
3. Texans Care for Children (2017). Alone No More: How Texas Policymakers Can Support Mothers with Perinatal Depression.
4. Meadows Public Policy Institute (2018, March). "Substance Use Disorder Landscape."
5. Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force (2018, September). Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force and Department of State Health Services Joint Biennial Report. Texas Department of Health and Human Services.