

February 10, 2021

Dear Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee,

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my testimony.

My name is Julie Martin. My husband Larry Martin and I are the parents of Michaela Martin. We are so very proud of Michaela and the commitment she has made to this bill, and more importantly, her dedication in attempting to improve people's lives through access to education. I am writing today in support of SB 565.

This matters to me because I was also a student parent, as was my husband.

Prior to meeting my husband, I was a single parent. As such, it took me six years to attain my associates degree. I can only give you a glimpse of the resistance I encountered. Financially, emotionally, even socially. I actually had an influential person tell me that I should quit college and focus on being a parent! Yeah, because being a welfare mom for the rest of my life was exactly what I dreamt of growing up to be when I was a child. Despite discouragement from various individuals, I did not give up.

I began taking classes when my daughter was just 2 months old. At first I was able to attend classes full-time. Then, federal policy changes stated full-time students could no longer receive medical assistance as they could utilize campus clinics. At that point, I had to drop down to part-time, as my campus did not have a medical facility. I had to choose between medical coverage for my child or my education. My daughter was born with fluid in her lungs and had lasting health issues as a result. She had pneumonia 4 times before she was 4 years old. Keeping medical coverage was a necessity.

During my time as a student, I also had to retake numerous classes and saw my grades suffer greatly. This was due largely to not having a good support network. Each time my daughter was ill I would miss class and/or fall behind. Needless to say, I missed a LOT of classes. Had I had a support network in these situations, or had the school had a system in place that helped student parents be successful, I believe I would have eventually achieved the goals I had set out to.

Eventually I had to return to work full-time and give up on my dream of becoming a teacher. Primarily because I could not support my daughter and myself working only part-time and receiving part-time student aid.

Towards the end of my educational journey, the program I was enrolled in was cancelled at my campus. As a result, I would have had to move to another city to complete the program. As a single parent, moving was not an option. At that point, I asked the school what degree I could get with the credits I already had, and graduated. I am grateful for having attained my degree, however, I would have liked to have gone further in my education had it been possible.

My husband actually completed his bachelor's degree before we met. However, when our son was 3-years-old he went back to college to get his degree in Emergency Medicine to become a Paramedic. This was difficult as he had to quit his job in order to attend the program which was Monday through Friday, 8-5. Essentially, I became a single parent again...

At that point, we became a single income family living on the wages of a Medical Receptionist. He experienced the struggle of trying to be a parent as well as a student. We were lucky, we had good credit. We were able to put our rent (as well as MANY other bills) on our credit card those months that my paycheck alone wasn't enough to support a family of 4. Which included full-time childcare. Not to mention, we had two children with various health issues. It was very difficult for us financially.

Then there's the time factor. Not having enough time for your family or the responsibilities you have outside the classroom. Never having enough time to study, on top of class time and family responsibilities. And lets not underestimate the emotional impact of being a student parent. The constant worry that you are letting your family down by not being there, or the flip side, letting them down if you fail. Feeling guilty for not being there for them the way you know you should be. And the impact all of this has on your children. All the missed doctors appointments, soccer games, band concerts, helping with homework, and just being there for them when they need you.

This all takes a tremendous toll on a person. Not just on your health and well being, but on your family and relationships as well. It also impacts your ability to be successful in completing your educational goals.

This bill would help schools recognize the sheer amount of parents attending school. And hopefully, start to recognize that students come in all shapes and sizes, including families. And understand that each of these students have different needs, AND VALUE. These students count. PLEASE COUNT THEM.

All students deserve to have the programs they need in order to succeed academically and Senate Bill 564 is the first step towards making this possible.

Thank you Senator Gelser for championing this bill and Chair Dembrow for sponsoring it. Also, thank you to the committee for this opportunity to submit my testimony in support of SB 564.

Sincerely,

Julie and Larry Martin