

House Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
SB0204 Education – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established
Bill Hearing Date February 4, 2026
Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Linda Bergofsky, and I am an educator and civic volunteer from Poolesville (District 15). I strongly support the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence because our state should recognize students who demonstrate responsibility, initiative, and devotion to their communities through meaningful civic engagement.

In my experience, civic learning is most impactful when young people apply their knowledge beyond the classroom. For example, I have been a substitute teacher in Montgomery County Public Schools since 2019, working with students in every grade level and in every subject. I have also had the privilege of serving as a judge in the Montgomery County History Day competition for the past six years and never fail to be impressed with the caliber of work. And, I have served as an election judge for 18 years (in both Anne Arundel and Montgomery Counties) and have seen a growing number of future voters actively engaged in our democracy. Through this kind of work, students develop essential civic skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, ethical decision-making, and respect for diverse perspectives.

Currently, too few students see civic engagement recognized as a core part of educational success. A graduation seal would signal that Maryland values service, participation, and leadership alongside academic achievement and career preparation.

The Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence would recognize students who demonstrate civic knowledge, service, leadership, and commitment to the common good. More than an award, the Seal sends a clear message that civic learning matters, that participation is valued, and that young people's contributions to their communities deserve to be seen and celebrated. Research and experience tell us that when students are given meaningful pathways for civic engagement, they are more likely to vote, volunteer, stay informed, and remain connected to their communities over time.

This is an especially meaningful moment to establish the Seal as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Honoring students who actively live out the principles of responsibility, self-government, and commitment to the common good helps ensure that the next generation is prepared to sustain our democratic republic.

Please return a FAVORABLE report on SB0204.

Thank you.