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Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee

Joint Committee on Federal Relations



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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Testimony SB204: Civic Excellence
Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
Wednesday, February 4, 2026, 2:00 PM

Too many Marylanders lack a clear understanding of our civic processes, making education on them essential to fostering lifelong engagement and strengthening our institutions

SB204 would create a flexible framework to recognize public schools and students for exemplary work in civic engagement, leadership, and understanding of government. The Senate passed the Kagan/Ready Civic Excellence bill unanimously in 2023, 2024, and 2025. Last session, 26 Senators co-sponsored the bill, including Senate President Ferguson. We have a minor modification to this year's bill in order to provide meaningful support to schools without imposing overly prescriptive requirements. After discussions with the Superintendent of the MD State Department of Education (MSDE), the bill now empowers schools while providing guidance. The legislation is modeled on Arizona's Civics Literacy Program ([Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-259](#)).

The Civic Excellence Program will:

- Direct MSDE, in consultation with experts and stakeholders, to establish standards or guidance to determine student proficiency in civics and civic literacy.
- Authorize local school systems to adopt their own approaches, assessments, and recognition methods that align with or exceed MSDE's guidance.
- Encourage, without mandating, partnerships with universities, nonprofits, and civic organizations to support program implementation.
- Allow participating public schools or districts to recognize students with a cord, medal, or other insignia on their high school diploma.

This plan would balance statewide guidance with local flexibility, allowing schools to design programs that best fit their students while ensuring civic excellence is recognized across Maryland.

Twelve other states (AZ, CA, GA, IN, NC, NV, NY, OH, OK, PA, TN, and VA) already have, or are implementing, Civic Seal Programs. We can join this growing movement and recognize the next generation of engaged leaders.

I respectfully urge another favorable report on SB204.