

## **Jessica Ansa**

### **House Ways & Means Committee**

### **HB 57 Education – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established**

**Bill Hearing Date January 29, 2026**

**Position: Favorable**

My name is Jessica Ansa, and I am a student at Bowie High School in Prince George's County. I strongly support the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence because students who engage deeply in civic learning and community leadership deserve meaningful recognition for their time, effort, and impact.

In my experience, civic learning is most powerful when students are trusted with real responsibility. As the Co-Founder and Executive Director of PAYJE (Powerful and Young Justice Empowered), a youth-led civic education organization, I design civic education programming, write policy explainers, and lead initiatives focused on policy literacy, economic justice, and community engagement. Through this work, I have learned how to research legislation, communicate complex policy issues to peers, and organize youth to participate thoughtfully in civic life.

I have also contributed to civic engagement through roles such as a Civic Engagement Intern with TurnUp Activism, a member of the Maryland Association of Student Councils Civic Engagement Committee, and a Youth Advisor to Maryland Public Television's Media Literacy Youth Advisory Council. Across these experiences, I have seen how student-led civic work builds critical thinking, leadership, collaboration, and a lifelong commitment to democratic participation.

Many students care deeply about their communities but do not see clear pathways connecting civic engagement to school success or graduation. A Seal of Civic Excellence would help change that by showing students that service, participation, and leadership are valued and worth pursuing. A graduation seal matters because it affirms that civic engagement is just as important as academic achievement, athletics, or career readiness.

This is the right time to establish the Seal of Civic Excellence as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Recognizing students who actively live out democratic ideals today helps ensure that the next generation is prepared to carry our democratic republic forward.

Thank you for your time and for considering my testimony in support of HB 57.

Respectfully,  
Jessica Ansa