

SB204.Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Anisa Kalil

Position: FAV

Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee
SB 204 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 Anisa Kalil and I am a high school student from Baltimore County. I support the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence because students who do meaningful civics projects deserve to be recognized for the time, effort, and leadership they put into improving their communities.

In my own experience, civic learning is most powerful when students are trusted with real responsibility. As a leader for the Maryland Civic Education Coalition's Youth Advisory Council, I've seen first hand the profound impact that civic engagement initiatives students run have on their communities. For example, the youth-led town hall we led this past spring was a state-wide webinar aiming to teach students across Maryland about the avenues they can take to advocate for themselves and their community. Through this experience, I learned that collective civic engagement is key to a more well-rounded and inviting community.

Many students care deeply about their communities but do not see clear pathways that connect 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 shows that civic engagement is just as important as academic achievement, athletics, or career readiness.

This is the right time to create the Seal of Civic Excellence as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Honoring students who live out those ideals today helps ensure that the next generation is ready to carry our nation forward.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

HB 57 Testimony from Blessing Chang.pdf

Uploaded by: Blessing Chang

Position: FAV

[Blessing Chang & 12114 Quadrille Lane]

House Ways & Means Committee

HB 57 Education – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established

Bill Hearing Date January 29, 2026

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Blessing Chang, and I am a 11th grader at Bowie High School in Bowie Maryland. I support the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence because students who do meaningful civics projects deserve to be recognized for the time, effort, and leadership they put into improving their communities.

In my own experience, civic learning is most powerful when students are trusted with real responsibility. Through my involvement with the Maryland Association of Student Councils (MASC), I have taken on leadership roles that go beyond participation. As a student presenter, I helped lead sessions that introduced students from different counties to civic engagement, student advocacy, and statewide student leadership. In addition to presenting, I worked with other student leaders to uplift concerns shared by students across counties, particularly around access to resources, mental health support, and representation. Being part of MASC allowed me to see how student voices move from individual experiences to statewide conversations, and how organized student leadership can influence how adults understand student needs. Through this experience, I learned that civic education is most impactful when students are not just learning about government, but actively practicing leadership, collaboration, and representation on behalf of others.

Many students care deeply about their communities but do not see clear pathways that connect 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 shows that civic engagement is just as important as academic achievement, athletics, or career readiness.

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

Thank you for considering my testimony.

SB Testimony from Joshua Oh.pdf

Uploaded by: Caleb Oh

Position: FAV

Joshua Oh, 2213 Huntvalley Way

Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee

SB 204 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 Joshua Oh, and I am a senior at Crofton High School. I support the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence because students who do meaningful civics projects deserve to be recognized for the time, effort, and leadership they put into improving their communities.

In my own experience, civic learning is most powerful when students are trusted with real responsibility. For the past decade I've run a non-profit called Kid Changemakers. It started from the no's we received because of our age when trying to volunteer so we created our own opportunities for ourselves and fellow children. After Covid I lobbied with Senator Elfreth and testified to get SB-316 passed removing the tax on baby diapers in Maryland saving 12 millions dollars a year. Throughout the time working with students and growing with service integral in my life I've seen how important recognition and positive reinforcement is. This bill may seem minor to you but kids are constantly being downplayed for their efforts in the classroom and volunteering. In the years I've been a part of the MDCEC YAC, we've continually worked for this bill because of how important it is to us. It is something that on the surface may seem small or unnecessary but to me is another step to unlocking civics to all. Passing the bill made me learn that civics can be for kids. I used to believe it was only for adults but this bill can break that viewpoint. It will get more kids involved in something bigger than ourselves that isn't recognized often.

Many students care deeply about their communities but do not see clear pathways that connect 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 shows that civic engagement is just as important as academic achievement, athletics, or career readiness.

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

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Camille DiGiovanni Testimony SB0204.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Camille Elizabeth

Position: FAV



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

Senate Bill 0204 Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established

**Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee – 2/2/26
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2026 legislative session. WDC is one of Maryland's largest and most active Democratic clubs with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of SB0204. This bill will create a voluntary Maryland Civic Excellence Program that allows schools to recognize students for strong civic knowledge and engagement. It helps students learn how their government works and how they can take part in their communities. I am especially passionate about this bill because I am in high school and see firsthand how many students don't learn enough about civics. Programs like this can make a real difference by helping students understand how to be active, informed citizens. Passing this bill is important for women and children because learning about civics helps young people to become active community members and take part in processes that directly affect them. Students who understand democracy are more likely to vote, get involved in their communities, and speak up about issues that are important to them. This is especially important for girls and women, who are still largely underrepresented in leadership positions. In Maryland, roughly one-third of 18-year-olds are not registered to vote, showing that while we have made progress in terms of improving civic engagement, we still have a ways to go. SB0204 is an optional, low-cost way to support this improvement using existing school resources.

We ask for your support for SB0204 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Camille DiGiovanni
WDC *NextGen*
Advancing Democracy
Subcommittee

Cynthia Rubenstein
WDC President

Kate Stein
WDC Advocacy Chair

c.pdf

Uploaded by: Diane McMahon

Position: FAV

c/o Senator Kagan
Maryland General Assembly
Senate Office Building Room
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

February 2, 2026

SUBJECT: PLEASE PASS THE MARYLAND CIVIC SEAL - HB SB0204

Dear Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee Members,

The Maryland Civic Seal is more than an award.

It is a symbol that sends a clear signal that participation, service, and informed citizenship are valued outcomes of education.

States that have adopted similar seals are elevating civic learning and giving students meaningful incentives to engage in their communities.

Research shows that when students have real opportunities to practice civic skills, they are more likely to vote, volunteer, stay informed, and stay connected over time.

I am writing to give written testimony that Maryland should be part of that growing national effort.

I am a sociology professor at a Maryland Community College. Students in our sociology courses are actively volunteering in the community. It helps them connect with future employers and gives them a sense of pride and responsibility for the people that live in their neighborhoods.

I can also attest to the fact that students that volunteer also vote given national statistics. Students that vote understand that are elected representatives can help make a difference in the lives of their own family members, and extended community.

Please support **HB SB0204!**

Diane

Dr. Diane McMahon
Allegany College of Maryland
12401 Willowbrook Road,
Cumberland, MD 21502

Emmaline Andersen- Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Emmaline Andersen

Position: FAV

Emmaline Andersen, 120 Churchwardens Rd. Baltimore, MD, 21212

House Ways & Means Committee

HB 57 Education – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established

Bill Hearing Date January 29, 2026

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Emmaline Andersen, and I am a 9th grade student at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. I support the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence because students who do meaningful civics projects deserve to be recognized for the time, effort, and leadership they put into improving their communities.

In my own experience, civic learning is most powerful when students are trusted with real responsibility. I started a club at my high school that works to learn about government processes and advocate for particular bills or causes the club supports. Through this experience, I learned about the importance of standing up for what you believe in and helping peers to stand up too.

Many students care deeply about their communities but do not see clear pathways that connect 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 shows that civic engagement is just as important as academic achievement, athletics, or career readiness.

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

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Senate 2026 Seal of Civic Excellence MD-CEC Signin

Uploaded by: Genie Massey

Position: FAV



Senate Education, Energy & the Environment
SB 204 Education – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established
Bill Hearing Date January 29, 2025

Position: Support

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Committee Members:

As a coalition dedicated to civic education and empowerment, we express our unified support for establishing a Seal of Civic Excellence in Maryland public schools. This program is a visionary step towards recognizing and promoting the vital role of civic knowledge, skills, and engagement among PK-12 students. By formally acknowledging both students and schools that exhibit a profound commitment to civic involvement, this program will shine a light on the critical importance of civic education in developing participatory, thoughtful citizens.

This legislation would promote:

- **Enhanced Civic Education:** Encourages comprehensive civic learning, ensuring students grasp the fundamentals of democracy and civic responsibilities.
- **Active Student Engagement:** Promotes student involvement in civic and community activities, fostering a sense of responsibility and belonging.
- **Critical Thinking and Diversity:** Equips students to address societal issues thoughtfully, valuing diverse perspectives.
- **Community and Democracy Strengthening:** Extends impact beyond schools, encouraging community partnership and participation in civic life.

We believe the Seal of Civic Excellence will significantly benefit Maryland's youth, schools, and communities by promoting civic knowledge, skills, and engagement. This program is a crucial investment in our democratic future, preparing students to be active, informed participants in the democratic process.

We urge the Maryland General Assembly to support this initiative, and our coalition is ready to assist in any way to ensure its successful implementation.

We the undersigned respectfully urge the Committee to report favorably on HB057.



Carroll Community College Democracy Lab



HB 57 Testimony from Jessica Ansa.pdf

Uploaded by: Jessica Ansa

Position: FAV

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

SB204_MSEA_Lamb_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Lauren Lamb

Position: FAV

FAVORABLE
Senate Bill 204
Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
February 4, 2026

Lauren Lamb
Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 204, which would establish the Maryland Civic Excellence Program in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and authorize a local school system to participate to recognize students who demonstrate excellence in civics and civic literacy. It would also require MSDE, no later than the 2027-2028 school year, to develop guidelines to assist participating local school systems.

MSEA represents 76,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 44 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

We support this bill's aim of increasing civic engagement among young people. The program described in this bill creates an incentive for schools and students to excel in civic literacy, and we applaud efforts to encourage students to register to vote and strive for academic achievement in social studies, government, and civics coursework.

It is crucial that any civic excellence criteria established under this program do not increase the already considerable amount of time students spend taking standardized assessments. We also encourage greater equity of access to civic-minded extracurricular activities and support efforts to ensure diverse and holistic social studies and civics education for all students.

We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 204.

SB204 - FAV - Lena Morreale Scott 2-2-26 final .pd

Uploaded by: Lena Morreale Scott

Position: FAV



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

3203 Benjamin Building
3942 Campus Drive
College Park, Maryland 20742

EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Senate Bill 0204 – Education – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established
February 2, 2026

Favorable Report (FAV)

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and honorable Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on Senate Bill 0204, which seeks to establish the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence program. My name is Lena Morreale Scott and I serve as the Director of Civic Education & Engagement for the College of Education and as the Principal Investigator of the Maryland Democracy Initiative at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am also a co-founder and chair of the Maryland Civic Education Coalition. I have worked in the field of civic education for more than 35 years as a Maryland public school Social Studies teacher, as a curriculum and professional development specialist in a Maryland-based nonprofit civic education organization, and as a member and leader of multiple state and national nonpartisan civic education coalitions. At the College of Education, I have taught pre-service Social Studies teachers and I now lead our university's new Maryland Democracy Initiative, which leverages scholars and practitioners from the College of Education as well as our School of Public Policy, the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, and the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences. Together, we strengthen democracy through research, innovative teaching and learning, and democratic engagement opportunities.

I am honored to express my support for one of the most fundamental ways to strengthen our shared democracy: meaningful, equitable, and high-quality civic education. As you know, an informed and engaged citizenry is essential to representative democracy, responsive government, and to strong communities. SB0204 will strengthen democracy through civic education by incentivizing and celebrating students who are especially knowledgeable, prepared, and civically-engaged. It will also incentivize and celebrate schools that demonstrate excellence in preparing students for life-long service and civic engagement.

Survey after survey, study after study, test scores after test scores show that Americans' civic knowledge is remarkably low and that many people lack important civic skills such as dialogue, consensus-building, and information / media literacy. We also know that many people are losing confidence in their ability to make a difference in their democracy. Effective civic education makes a difference. Students who participate in high-quality civics are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and experiences to participate more successfully and they have the agency necessary to believe their participation matters.

With the creation of the Civic Excellence Program, Maryland can reverse an alarming trend which has marginalized the teaching of Social Studies to emphasize reading and math scores at the expense of other competencies, like civic competency. For example, federal spending per pupil on civic education is just \$2.83 compared to nearly \$60.00 per pupil spending on STEM education. The Maryland Civic Excellence Program gives us the opportunity to rededicate our attention to teaching for civic engagement.

There is good news, too. While there is so much focus on partisanship and division, there are well-established "proven" and "promising" best practices in civic education --- that have been established by cross-partisan scholars and practitioners. There are also exciting innovations happening in civic education, including initiatives led by many of the educators and civic partners who are members of our Maryland Civic Education Coalition. With The Maryland Civic Excellence Program, we want to ensure that all students have access to those high-

quality experiences and that all teachers have access to professional development to ensure they can use high-impact practices with success and fidelity.

We believe SB0204 has the power to amplify many of the priorities of the Moore Administration, including the programs and initiatives of the Department of Service and Civic Innovation and the Maryland State Department of Education. As you know, students must complete 75 hours of service-learning to graduate from high school. Service-learning is one of those high impact civic education practices. Through the Maryland Civic Excellence Program, we can catalyze students' positive experiences with civic learning and service-learning to prepare and inspire young people to life-long service and civic engagement.

Looking ahead, I hope the University of Maryland together with our many partners in the Maryland Civic Education Coalition and the Maryland State Department of Education, will be able to support district leaders in developing and implementing their programs in ways that are measurable, impactful, and equitable. As the program matures, we hope to partner with others to provide school leaders with resources to support teacher professional development and innovation. We would also like to see future programs include opportunities for students to be celebrated for participating in civic-themed extra-curricular activities and elective courses from all content areas, not just Social Studies. For example, we know student journalists who cover local news and student "citizen scientists" are engaging in their civic life and contributing to the public good, too! We would also like to see opportunities for outstanding elementary and middle schools to be recognized in the program. Many of our most innovative approaches to service-learning and civic education start with our youngest learners. To be clear, we are not suggesting amendments to the current bill. We are simply enthusiastic about what may be possible in the future. We stand ready to support the program's success.

Imagine building our shared democracy together, with teaching and learning that celebrates and elevates life-long service and civic participation. The Maryland Civic Excellence Program strengthens the civic mission of our schools and our democracy's foundation. Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts regarding Senate Bill 0204. I appreciate your leadership, as well as the leadership of Delegate Vogel and Senators Kagan and Ready, on this bipartisan bill. I strongly urge a favorable report.



Lena Morreale Scott
Director, Civic Education & Engagement Initiative
Principal Investigator, [Maryland Democracy Initiative](#)
Co-chair, [Maryland Civic Education Coalition](#)
Maryland Representative, [CivX Now State Policy Task Force](#)
University of Maryland College of Education
LScott12@umd.edu

SB0204_Linda Bergofsky_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Linda Bergofsky

Position: FAV

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.

LWVMD 2-4 SB 204 Education – Maryland Civic Excel

Uploaded by: Lois Hybl

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

SB 204 Education – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established

Position: Favorable

By: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: February 4, 2026

The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) believes in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitutions of the United States and of Maryland. Sustaining our democratic form of government depends upon civic education as a key component of the democratic process.

SB 204 Education – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established would empower local education agencies to establish a seal of civic engagement to recognize students who demonstrate responsibility, initiative, and devotion to their communities through meaningful civic engagement. We support SB 204 to incentivize students to invest more time and effort in civic education and service learning and elevate the overall value of civics in Maryland's public schools.

Civic education occurs in many settings beyond the school day, such as in sports, volunteer organizations, houses of worship, political rallies and campaigns, and at the polling place on Election Day. We support opportunities for students to put learning into practice such as in service-learning experiences, extra-curricular activities, school and community engagement, and opportunities to participate in school governance. We support strengthening service and volunteer opportunities as a pathway to stronger communities, improved mental health, improved academic outcomes, and a healthier democracy as individuals work in groups to solve issues they care about.

Ensuring the future of our democratic republic is dependent on fostering civic knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions. Maryland students who excel academically in social studies and exceed expectations in volunteer and service-learning should be recognized for their achievements. This recognition will serve as a concrete signal to colleges and employers that they will engage productively as members of the community.

The League and its 2,000 members urge the committee to give a favorable report on SB 204.

MMD SB 204 Favorable Testimony Feb 2026.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Margaret Dineen

Position: FAV

Mary Margaret Dineen
310 S. East Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21224

Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee

SB 204 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 Mary Margaret Dineen, and I am a community member from Baltimore City. 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, as someone who has a 25-year career working on democracy and governance programs overseas, I know of the dangers to democracy when a society does not support younger generations to develop and practice the norms and skills of democratic interaction. Civic learning is most impactful when young people apply their knowledge beyond the classroom. Through this 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.

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 report favorably on HB 57.

Sincerely,
Mary Margaret Dineen

Michael_Butkiewicz_SB204_CivicExcellence_2026.pdf

Uploaded by: Michael Butkiewicz

Position: FAV

Michael Butkiewicz

9904 Belhaven Road, Bethesda, Maryland 20817

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

SB 204 Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established

Bill Hearing Date February 4th, 2026

Position: Favorable

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

My name is Michael Butkiewicz, and I am an author and civic-education researcher from Montgomery County whose work has appeared across regional outlets. I write today in support of SB 204, though my support is grounded not in the belief that this bill is a comprehensive solution, but in the recognition that Maryland currently lacks any statewide structure for recognizing civic engagement. In a landscape defined by absence, even an incremental step carries real value.

I want to be candid about the limitations. The bill decentralizes criteria for the Seal of Civic Excellence, which means students in different counties may face different thresholds for what “excellence” entails. That inconsistency is not trivial. It reflects a broader reality that Maryland has no statewide incentive structure that treats civic learning with the seriousness afforded to STEM or literacy under ESSA. Civics is taught, but it is not prioritized, and students often struggle to see how their civic knowledge connects to real-world participation.

While not a comprehensive solution, SB 204 creates an important opportunity to make civic engagement visible and valued. My research, spanning institutional design and the history of civic-republican thought, consistently leads me to the same conclusion: a republic cannot rely on participation alone; it requires a knowledgeable citizenry capable of judgment, dialogue, and responsibility. We have long taken for granted that these capacities will simply emerge. They do not. They must be cultivated.

Maryland’s civic educators already do extraordinary work, but they operate without a statewide signal that civic engagement is valued. A voluntary, additive recognition, one that does not impose new graduation requirements or unfunded mandates, offers a pragmatic way to elevate civic learning without repeating the

concerns raised during debates over HB 1157 (2021). This bill respects local control while creating a statewide incentive pathway that has been missing for decades.

SB 204 will not solve every structural challenge in civic education, but it will do something essential: it makes civic engagement visible. I hope this program can serve as a foundation the General Assembly may build upon as Maryland develops a more coherent statewide civic readiness strategy. It will tell students that their contributions to their communities matter. It will tell schools that civic development is not ornamental but foundational. And it will tell the state that, as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, we are willing to invest, modestly but meaningfully, in the next generation of Marylanders who will inherit the work of self-government

Please report favorably on SB 204.

Thank you for your consideration.

Montgomery County Board of Education_SB 204_Suppor

Uploaded by: Patricia Ursprung

Position: FAV



MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Expanding Opportunity and Unleashing Potential

15 West Gude Drive ♦ Suite 100 ♦ Rockville, Maryland 20850

BILL: Senate Bill 204

TITLE: Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established

DATE: February 4, 2026

POSITION: Support

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

CONTACT: Patricia Ursprung, Coordinator, Legislative Affairs

The Montgomery County Board of Education supports Senate Bill 204.

This bill establishes the Maryland Civic Excellence Program within the Maryland State Department of Education and authorizes school systems to participate in the program. The program is a way to recognize students and public schools that promote the civic readiness and civic engagement of students in public schools in Maryland.

On August 21, 2025, the Montgomery County Board of Education adopted a legislative platform that contains priority issues and ongoing concerns. One of the ongoing concerns is being able to develop students who are future ready. This means, students will be able to demonstrate proficiency in skills and knowledge they need to adapt, lead, and make meaningful contributions to their communities. Being knowledgeable about civic engagement falls into this goal. Importantly, the program is elective, so there is no infringement on local control or curricular mandate that may impact the Board's ability to support the legislation.

As a result, and based on the Board's adopted platform, the Montgomery County Board of Education supports Senate Bill 204 and requests a **favorable** report.

Testimony in support of SB0204 - Public Schools -

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0204_RichardKaplowitz_FAV
02/04/2026

Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON SB#/0204- POSITION: FAVORABLE

Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#/0204, **Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established**

If Maryland schools are to prepare students for the future as engaged citizens schools should be incentivized to promote and reward the students who have acquired and applied knowledge of civics. Students must be encouraged to learn that freedom also means responsibility and guided to recognize and make those citizen responsibilities a part of their future.

This bill promotes that goal by establishing the Maryland Civic Excellence Program in the State Department of Education; authorizing a local school system to participate in the Program to recognize students who meet criteria related to student proficiency in civics and civic literacy; and requiring the Department, no later than the 2027-2028 school year, to develop guidelines to assist participating local school systems.

The success of our democracy and society depends on civic education. It equips us with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to become informed citizens actively participating in our democratic process. Civic education helps us understand our rights and responsibilities as citizens, promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and responsible action. ¹

If our youth are the future, everything we can do to help them make that future happen with the knowledge and tools they need can secure that future for them and our counties, state, and nation.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#/0204.

¹ <https://civicsforlife.org/the-importance-of-civic-education/>

Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Samantha Fowler

Position: FAV

February 2, 2026

To the Honorable Members of the Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

My name is Samantha Fowler, and I live in Montgomery County. I am here to express my strong support for Senate Bill 0204, which aims to establish the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence program.

As a teacher, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of civic education. Civic knowledge and engagement are crucial for the health of our democracy and the development of responsible, informed citizens. However, these areas often receive insufficient emphasis in our educational system.

The Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence program represents a vital step forward. By formally recognizing students who excel in their understanding and participation in civic life, we can:

- Motivate students to engage more deeply with civic education and activities.
- Highlight the importance of being informed about local, state, and national issues.
- Encourage schools to prioritize civic learning in their curricula.

I have facilitated meaningful civic education programs, such as Project Citizen and We the People, in my classroom. I have witnessed how civic engagement not only makes political concepts more accessible to students, but also encourages them to be active in civic life in their community. I have had several students who were inspired to do their own policy research projects or intern with local officials because of powerful civic opportunities at my school. The Seal of Civic Excellence will encourage even more students to understand issues in their local communities and how to approach these issues considering multiple perspectives and in a nonpartisan way.

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.

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 report favorably on SB 0204. Thank you for your time and support of civic education!

Sincerely,
Samantha Fowler

Sen. Kagan Testimony SB204_ Civic Excellence.pdf

Uploaded by: Sen. Cheryl Kagan

Position: FAV

CHERYL C. KAGAN
Legislative District 17
Montgomery County

Vice Chair
Education, Energy, and
the Environment Committee

Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee

Joint Committee on Federal Relations



Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Suite 2 West
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3134
800-492-7122 Ext. 3134
Cheryl.Kagan@senate.maryland.gov

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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.

SB0204-FAV-Lipko.pdf

Uploaded by: Seth Lipko

Position: FAV

SB 204 FAV

Seth Lipko

1121 Nottingham Dr.

Glen Burnie MD, 21061

District 32

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

I am writing to express my support of SB0204. One of the biggest threats to our system of governance, not only in our country, but in our state, is ignorance. Many of the current hot-button political issues are a result of people not understanding the “who” about an issue. Who has the decision-making authority on insert-whatever-hot-button-issue. Many divisive topics can be deflated with knowing this simple answer. This question, and its answer, is the heart of civics. And a solution to the problem of many passionate debates is better civics education. If we make the proper educational investments in our youth, the next generation will be stronger and better equipped to handle the political issues of their day.

I remember my time in school. I paid just enough attention in my government class to pass. It wasn't until I was an adult, years out of school, that I realized that civic literacy is one of the most vital competencies that an American can hold. This bill has the potential to enable more young people to understand and engage in the process of being well-represented, all the way from Washington D.C., to Annapolis, down to their homeowners associations!

Convention of States Action Maryland is a non-profit educational organization that has been active across the state and within the General Assembly for years. One of our focus areas has been teaching civics to adults and children outside of school systems. Its the organization where I caught up on much of my late-learned civics knowledge. This bill will provide a more official and incentivized structure for us to collaborate with young people on building this critical skill set within local school systems.

I do think that civics is best learned outside of the classroom, and there are plenty of organizations that can make learning civics more exciting and engaging. My understanding is that currently, schools and teachers are overburdened already, and this bill will help outside organizations to come alongside the schools and provide supplement education.

Thank you for your attention in this matter and for your public service in the General Assembly. I encourage you to provide a favorable report on this bill.

--Seth Lipko, Legislative Liaison for Convention of States Action Maryland

SB204 Testimony - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Sharon Green

Position: FAV

Sharon Green
7902 Ivy Ln. Pikesville, MD 21208

SB204 Education – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established

Bill Hearing Date February 2, 2026

Position: Favorable

Dear Sen. Kagan and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is **Sharon Green**, and I am a parent and educator from Baltimore County. 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. I have supported students with projects where they are engaging with the community for years, and every year it is the most memorable and impactful part of their studies. This is how we break down the walls of the classroom to allow students an opportunity to see how vital it is to talk with neighbors and make connections to build the community, state, and country they envision. Through this type 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.

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 report favorably on SB204.

Thank you.

Sharon Green

SB 204 - DSCI Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephen Horman

Position: FAV



Maryland
Department of Service and Civic Innovation

WES MOORE, Governor
ARUNA MILLER, Lieutenant Governor
JONNY DORSEY, *Acting Secretary*
SARAH FLAMMANG, *Deputy Secretary*

February 2, 2026

The Honorable Brian Feldman
Chair - Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and the Honorable Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

The Maryland Department of Service and Civic Innovation requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 204 - "Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established".

The development of the Maryland Civic Excellence Program within the State Department of Education is a necessary action to help provide the means to recognize and promote civic engagement within our Maryland schools. This program would empower schools to promote civic education while allowing the flexibility to design and implement civic learning initiatives that reflect the needs, strengths, and priorities of their own communities.

The Maryland Department of Service and Civic Innovation remains committed to promoting civic literacy and engagement throughout the State, and this program aligns with that mission. Service and civic engagement are nonpartisan strategies that can help us bridge community divides. By promoting these values through proposed programs such as the Maryland Civic Excellence Program, communities can help support young, service-minded leaders who foster unity within their local neighborhoods. The voluntary nature of the program allows both schools and individuals the flexibility to adjust the program to their specific community needs and strengths. This approach to civic engagement enables communities to better address their unique situations and ultimately makes the program more effective.

Senate Bill 204 and the development of the Maryland Civic Excellence Program are necessary steps to help promote civic engagement amongst young people in the State of Maryland. A civic seal of excellence helps incentivize program participation and can help cultivate leadership skills throughout young people who would not otherwise have taken advantage of such opportunities. A formal system of recognition helps drive participation and allows individuals to feel a sense of accomplishment upon completion.

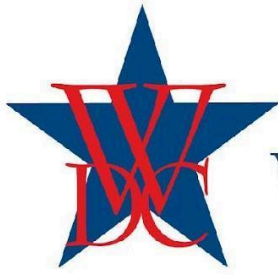
Fostering civic engagement is a crucial tool to help solve some of our modern societal problems. The Maryland Department of Service and Civic Innovation respectfully urges a favorable report of Senate Bill 204 and strongly believes in the core mission of the program. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Stephen Horman, Legislative Liaison, at stephen.horman@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,
Jonny Dorsey
Acting Secretary - Department of Service and Civic Innovation

Senate Bill 204 Written Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Uma Chivvis

Position: FAV



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

Senate Bill 0204 Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established

**Education, Energy, and the Environment – 2/2/26
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club** (WDC) for the 2026 legislative session. WDC is one of Maryland's largest and most active Democratic clubs with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of Senate Bill 0204.

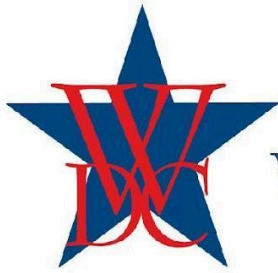
Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club** (WDC) for the 2026 legislative session. WDC is one of Maryland's largest and most active Democratic clubs with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of Senate Bill 0204. The issue that this bill addresses is the lack of civic readiness that faces most local public schools in Maryland. Youth civic engagement is critical for our democracy, our communities, our youth, and for equity.

The passage of this bill is important to women and children because learning about civics helps young people become informed citizens who can participate in democracy. Only 53% of high schoolers believe voting is important, meaning around half don't. This kind of voter apathy stems from a lack of information on local government systems and effective forms of community engagement. Maryland ranks 44th out of 50 states in terms of local election voting participation.

As a student at Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, I have seen the lack of civic awareness that most high schoolers have. Besides the required AP Government curriculum, most do not understand how to apply these teachings to their communities.

Establishing a program that rewards youth for civic engagement and excellence would help educate future voters on civic readiness and local elections, eventually increasing turnout. According to a study done by the University of Maryland, one third of new adult voters in Maryland remain unregistered when they turn 18. This shows that many young people graduate without the real civic knowledge that they need to participate in democracy as eligible voters. Although as a state we have made progress regarding youth civic engagement, this bill is a low-cost way to improve existing school resources.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

We ask for your support for SB0204 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Uma Chivvis
WDC NextGen
Advancing
Democracy
Subcommittee

Cynthia Rubenstein
WDC President

Kate Stein
WDC Advocacy Chair

2026-02-02 MAMWA Letter OPP HB 204.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Ochsenhirt

Position: UNF



Maryland Association of Municipal Wastewater Agencies, Inc.

Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission

14501 Sweitzer Lane, 7th Floor

Laurel, MD 20707

Tel: 301-206-7008

MEMBER AGENCIES

February 2, 2026

Allegany County
Anne Arundel County
City of Baltimore
Baltimore County
Town of Berlin
Cecil County
Town of Centreville
Charles County
City of Cumberland
D.C. Water
Easton Utilities
Frederick County
City of Hagerstown
Harford County
City of Havre de Grace
Howard County
Ocean City
Pocomoke City
Queen Anne's County
City of Salisbury
Somerset Co. Sanitary District
St. Mary's Metro. Comm.
Washington County
Worcester County
WSSC Water

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee
250 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: **OPPOSE -- HB 204 (Drinking Water – Regulation – Control and Prevention of Waterborne Disease)**

Dear Chair Korman:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Municipal Wastewater Agencies (MAMWA), I am writing to **OPPOSE HB 204**, which would require that a public water system (PWS) maintain a certain level of residual disinfectant, sample for residual concentrations at “frequent and regular intervals” to determine levels at “different points in the public water system,” and provide written notice to customers of any disruption (very broadly defined, to include, for example, water plant maintenance) in the distribution system if it could result in increased legionella bacteria levels. Failure to comply would subject a PWS to civil penalties.

MAMWA is a statewide association of local governments and wastewater treatment agencies that serve approximately 95% of the State's sewer population. Many of MAMWA's members also operate a PWS. MAMWA urges the Committee to vote **NO** on HB 204 for the following reasons:

- **HB 204 Implementation Costs Would Be Very High**

MAMWA Members who own and operate a PWS provided cost estimates to implement the proposed legislation:

- **Member #1:** Estimates \$40 M in capital for an interim retrofit of filters with granular activated carbon while planning permanent improvements; \$5 M in capital to pilot test new equipment; \$600,000 to \$1.4 B in capital for permanent treatment improvements (this includes cost estimates for PFAS and disinfection byproduct (DBP) precursor treatment to address simultaneous compliance with other Safe Drinking Water Act regulations).

GENERAL COUNSEL

AquaLaw PLC

- **Member #2:** Costs for all seven systems could range from \$10,000 to \$200,000 to implement the residual mandate. In addition, the utility would be required to scale up notification procedures, train staff, submit substantial records, and address a higher volume of inquiries from the Maryland Department of the Environment.
- **Member #3:** Estimates total expenditures for FY27 at \$335,776; for FY28 at \$242,839; for FY29 at \$250,124; for FY30 at \$257,628; and for FY31 at \$265,357.
- **Member #4:** Costs for compliance could reach \$100,000 per year.
- **Member #5:** The Member is working to assess financial impacts but anticipates substantial capital and operational investments to meet the proposed minimum residuals level creating an undue hardship for the system.

As noted below, MAMWA questions whether the financial burden borne by our drinking water customers and your constituents would provide any public health benefit.

- **Increased Risks from Disinfection Byproducts**

Chlorine reacts with naturally present organic materials during water treatment to form DBPs, including trihalomethanes and haloacetic acids. Both are hazardous chemicals regulated under the United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Safe Drinking Water Act. If PWS are required to increase residual chlorine levels to the prescribed minimum in the legislation, there will also be a rise in DBP formation.

- **No Measurable Impacts on Public Health**

Protecting public health is the primary objective of operating a PWS. That said, legionnaire's disease typically occurs when chlorine residuals are lost in privately owned buildings, like hospitals, long-term care facilities, and hotels, with poor building management or poor plumbing design. To improve public health impacts, we should be prioritizing best management practices for those facilities, including building management, building and energy efficiency codes, and plumbing infrastructure upgrades. A PWS has very limited jurisdiction beyond the meter—individual, privately-owned plumbing systems are not within our purview.

MAMWA urges the Committee to **Vote NO** on HB 204.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions at Lisa@AquaLaw.com or 804-716-9021.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Ochsenhirt
MAMWA Deputy General Counsel

cc: Environment and Transportation Committee Members, HB 204 Sponsor

HB0057 (SB0204)_ Public Schools - Maryland Civic

Uploaded by: Trudy Tibbals

Position: UNF

[HB0057 \(SB0204\)](#): Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established: Please VOTE to OPPOSE this bill **at this time**.

Dear Ways & Means and Education, Energy & the Environment Chair and Members of the Committee,

I write to **respectfully oppose HB 0057 / SB 0204 – Public Schools – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established, at this time**.

I want to be clear at the outset: **civic education is important**, and the goals of this program are thoughtful and well-intentioned. Helping students understand civic responsibility, government, and democratic participation is a worthy objective and one that I hope Maryland continues to support in the future.

However, **this is not the right moment to expand instructional mandates or programmatic expectations in our public schools**.

Across Maryland, students are struggling with **fundamental academic skills**. Reading proficiency, writing ability, math achievement, and science readiness remain pressing concerns. Teachers and schools are already stretched thin, working tirelessly to help students **catch up** in the core subjects that form the foundation for all future learning — including effective civic participation. Maryland's test scores for both ELA and Math are atrocious.

Before adding new statewide programs, we must first ensure that **every student can read fluently, write clearly, compute accurately, and understand basic scientific concepts**. Without these skills, even the most well-designed civic curriculum cannot be fully effective.

HB 0057 /SB 0204 risks **diverting limited instructional time, resources, and attention** away from these urgent priorities. At a time when educators are being asked to do more with less, the state should be laser-focused on **strengthening core academic outcomes** and supporting teachers in that mission.

This is not a rejection of civic education — it is a call for **proper sequencing and prioritization**. Once Maryland's students are consistently meeting foundational academic benchmarks, programs like the Maryland Civic Excellence Program can be introduced with far greater impact and success.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue an **unfavorable vote on HB 0057/SB 0204 AT THIS TIME, with the intention of bringing this program back**

when our students have been more successful with learning their core academics.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued work on behalf of Maryland's students and educators.

Sincerely,
Trudy Tibbals

SB 204 - State Board & MSDE - LOI.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Laurel Cratsley

Position: INFO

TO: Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

BILL: Senate Bill (SB) 204 - Public Schools – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established

DATE: February 4, 2026

POSITION: Letter of Information

EXPLANATION:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing information regarding SB 204, which establishes the Maryland Civic Excellence Program within the State Department of Education and authorizes local education agencies (LEAs) to participate in the program to recognize student proficiency in civics and civic literacy. MSDE recognizes the bill's intent to elevate civic readiness and engagement as a valued outcome of public education and to create a statewide framework to support local implementation.

SB 204 places responsibility for administering the Maryland Civic Excellence Program with MSDE and directs the Department to develop, by no later than the 2027–2028 school year, guidelines to assist participating LEAs in determining student proficiency in civics and civic literacy. The bill further authorizes LEAs to voluntarily establish a local Maryland Civic Excellence Program aligned to these state-developed guidelines, including application criteria and criteria for awarding a Seal of Civic Excellence to eligible students.

Under the bill, participating LEAs may award a Seal of Civic Excellence and recognize student achievement through cords, medals, or other insignia affixed to the student's high school diploma. LEAs may also collaborate with nonprofit organizations, civic organizations, or institutions of higher education to support program implementation. Beginning July 1, 2028, participating systems would be required to submit annual reports to MSDE on program participation and outcomes.

The State Board and MSDE have started discussions on how to develop a comprehensive, equitable framework for recognizing civic engagement, modeled, in part, on the Seal of Biliteracy. In these discussions, the State Board and MSDE have considered embedding the program in Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) and believe that the procedures and processes related to the program are better suited for regulations than statute.

As this work continues, the State Board and MSDE emphasize that statewide consistency coupled with local flexibility, clear definitions of civic knowledge and civic participation, multiple pathways for students to demonstrate proficiency, required reflection, and safeguards to ensure equitable access for all students, including students with disabilities and multilingual learners is critical.

In considering statewide development and implementation of a coherent civic excellence program, we feel

that convening a group of stakeholders to discuss how to execute this with fidelity in COMAR is necessary for its success. The State Board and MSDE are committed to engaging with stakeholders in the coming months to further discuss the civic excellence program.

As we build on this work, careful consideration will be given to how statewide guidelines can support local innovation while minimizing unintended disparities across jurisdictions. MSDE is also examining implementation considerations, including professional learning needs, documentation and verification processes, and reporting requirements, to ensure that participation in the program is feasible for LEAs and accessible to students across diverse communities.

MSDE respectfully offers this information for consideration as the committee deliberates SB 204 and looks forward to continued collaboration with the Legislature, State Board, and LEAs to advance civic readiness and civic literacy in Maryland in a rigorous, equitable, and sustainable manner.

For further information, please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at 443-571-5461 or Laurel.Cratsley@maryland.gov.

MD_SB204_EnergyEdCommTestimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Ryann Lynn

Position: INFO



February 2, 2026

Testimony on Information regarding Senate Bill 204: Maryland Civic Excellence Program

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

The News Literacy Project is a nonpartisan education nonprofit that works with teachers, school districts, states and community partners to ensure students receive news literacy instruction before they graduate from high school. During the 2024-25 school year, NLP's free resources were used by 15,000 educators to teach more than 575,000 students in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In Maryland, this included more than 270 educators, 9,500 students and over 23 school districts.

Across the country, civic seal programs emphasize that democracy depends on informed and engaged citizens, and schools play a critical role in preparing students for that responsibility. In Maryland, SB 204 presents an opportunity to promote participation in the democratic process and celebrate young people's contributions to their community.

As the Department of Education develops guidelines under SB 204, we encourage lawmakers to affirm news and media literacy as an essential component of civic proficiency and to recognize its critical role in preparing students for democratic participation in the modern information environment.

Students cannot meaningfully engage in civic life if they cannot navigate the current information landscape. Students must learn to evaluate sources, distinguish facts from misinformation, understand how media ecosystems function and recognize how information can be used to influence public opinion. Today's civic discourse is shaped by social media, algorithmic amplification, a rise in misinformation and rapidly changing artificial intelligence technologies. Preparing students for civic participation without these skills leaves them vulnerable and undermines the goals this bill seeks to advance.

True civic literacy also includes understanding the role of the First Amendment and a free press in American democracy, and why an independent, ethical press is essential to an informed public. It also requires an appreciation for professional and ethical standards in journalism, and the ability to apply those standards when evaluating sources and claims. These skills empower students not only to consume information responsibly but also to recognize the difference between evidence-based reporting and content designed to persuade, provoke or mislead. Civic excellence in the 21st century requires news literacy.

Please reach out to me should you have further questions at csalter@newslit.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CSalter", written in a cursive style.

Charles Salter

President & Chief Executive Officer