



Tc4health@gmail.com
www.qualequityaccess.com

January 27, 2026

BILL: HB 57 – Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
POSITION: Favorable with Amendment

RE: Statement of Support with Requested Amendments

Dear Chairwoman Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, Delegate Vogel and Honorable Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am Alita-Geri Carter, the owner of Qualequity Access, LLC., a consultancy grounded in data-driven transformation that advocates for quality, equity, access, and accessibility in healthcare and education. I am the mother of two children with disabilities, a former practicing nursing practitioner, special education parent advocate, and public health servant.

I am writing to express my support for the goals of **House Bill 57**, which seeks to elevate the importance of civic literacy and engagement in our public schools. Recognizing students who demonstrate civic excellence is a commendable way to foster a lifelong commitment to democratic participation.

However, for such a program to be truly excellent, it must be **equitable**. I am concerned that without specific language regarding accessibility, the "Seal of Civic Excellence" could inadvertently exclude students with disabilities who may participate in civic life in non-traditional but equally meaningful ways.

I respectfully urge the Committee to adopt the following amendments:

1. Mandate Inclusive Eligibility Criteria

Section 7-137(D) requires the Department to develop guidelines to determine "student proficiency". For students with intellectual or developmental disabilities, "proficiency" must be defined broadly to include their specific modes of engagement and learning.

- **Requested Amendment:** Amend Section 7-137(D) to state that the guidelines *must* include **alternative pathways and accommodations** to ensure that students of all abilities, including those with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), have an equitable opportunity to earn the Seal of Civic Excellence.

2. Diversify Stakeholder Consultation

The bill requires consultation with "experts and stakeholders" during guideline development.

- **Requested Amendment:** Specifically include **special education advocates and individuals with disabilities** in the stakeholder group to ensure the program's design is inclusive from the ground up.

3. Prevent "Gatekeeping" Through Self-Nomination

To ensure that all students have a voice, the application process for the Seal should not rely solely on administrative selection.



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- **Requested Amendment:** Explicitly authorize a **self-nomination pathway** for students to demonstrate their civic contributions, reducing the risk that political or social "gatekeeping" at the local level silences the voices of marginalized or non-traditional student leaders.

Conclusion

Civic excellence is not a "one size fits all" standard. By amending HB 57 to prioritize accessibility and inclusive excellence, Maryland can ensure that we are celebrating the civic contributions of **every** student.

I respectfully urge a Favorable with Amendments report on HB 57.

Respectfully Submitted,
Alita-Geri Carter, MSN, DNP-C, CPNP-PC, BCPA
Resident, Howard County, MD