

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 **Anne Manuel** and I am a retired educator and civic volunteer from North Woodside in Montgomery County. Now more than ever, I feel our state needs to recognize students who demonstrate responsibility, initiative, and devotion to their communities through meaningful civic engagement. The heightened polarization of our politics makes many youths want to withdraw at a time when we need their engagement more than ever. That's why I support the Maryland Civic Excellence Program.

When I was a teacher for 21 years at Montgomery Blair High School, I saw students' civic knowledge and commitment grow by leaps and bounds when they were able to apply their knowledge beyond the classroom. I used to teach a social studies course on International Human Rights. My students were required to engage in volunteer advocacy projects of their choosing throughout each semester. Through this work, students develop essential civic skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, ethical decision-making, and respect for diverse perspectives. They got real life experience that was worth much more than anything they might read in a textbook. A graduation seal would be a powerful way to recognize their work.

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.

Thank you.