

**Heather Wyatt-Nichol, PhD**

**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 Heather Wyatt-Nichol, and I am a parent of a young adult who graduated from the Baltimore County School System, and a resident of Baltimore County. I am also an educator and member of the Maryland Civic Education Coalition

In recent years, our society has witnessed the negative impact of hateful political rhetoric in politics and society. We must educate the next generation of leaders to fully understand the U.S. Constitution, the establishment of checks and balances, and the separation of powers between the branches and levels of government. We can do better in sharing different points of view on important policy topics, respecting one another as fellow citizens, facilitating community engagement, and restoring faith in our government.

As an educator who values the importance of civic engagement and recognizes the need for increased opportunities for civic engagement for students, I believe that the establishment of the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence program represents a significant advancement to enhance student learning and civic engagement. This program has the potential to inspire students to play an active role in shaping their communities and our democracy.

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 also an especially meaningful moment to establish the Seal as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Honoring students who actively understand government institutions, democratic principles, and the importance of commitment to the common good of all Marylanders and Americans helps ensure that the next generation is prepared to sustain our democratic republic.

Thank you,

Heather Wyatt-Nichol