

Kate McElhenny
PGCPS Social Studies Teacher

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 Kate McElhenny, and I am a parent and educator from Prince George’s County. I strongly support and advocate for the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence. Our state should recognize students who demonstrate responsibility, initiative, and devotion to their communities through meaningful civic engagement. As you may know, Arizona, California, Georgia, New York, Tennessee, and Virginia all award a Civics Seal. *Maryland should eagerly join the ranks.*

Students are taught civics with the aim of becoming informed and engaged citizens (Azizan et al., 2025; Gould et al., 2011; Jamieson, 2013; Cramer & Fons, 2021). Civic education is regarded as the antidote to tyranny and factiousness (Clark, 2021) and acts as the guardian of democracy (Gould et al., 2011; Haduong et al., 2024; Gärlick & Lucas, 2025). Those who have benefited from civics education are more likely to vote (Jamieson, 2013) and to contact their representatives, thereby increasing democratic accountability (Gould et al., 2011). The Report of the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge (2013) stated that current civic education efforts concerning politics and elections are effective in improving civic engagement and should be expanded.

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,

Kate McElhenny