



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

House Bill 0057 Public Schools - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established

**Ways and Means Committee – January 29, 2026
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 swift passage of HB0057. This bill will create a voluntary Maryland Civic Excellence Program that allows schools to recognize students for strong civic knowledge and engagement. It will help 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.

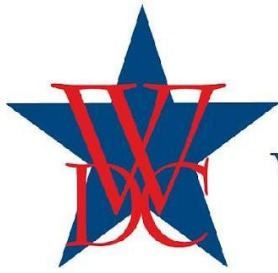
This is especially important for girls and women, who are still largely underrepresented in leadership positions. In Maryland, roughly one-third of 18-year-olds are not registered to vote, showing that while we have made progress in terms of improving civic engagement, we still have a long way to go. HB0057 is an optional, inexpensive way to improve civic engagement using existing school resources.

We ask for your support for HB0057 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Camille
DiGiovanni
WDC *NextGen*
Advancing
Democracy
Subcommittee

Cynthia Rubenstein
WDC President

Kate Stein
WDC Advocacy
Chair



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WDC urges the passage of House Bill 0057. 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.

We ask for your support for HB0057 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Uma Chivvis
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Cynthia Rubenstein
WDC President

Kate Stein
WDC Advocacy Chair