

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 57

Public Schools – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established

To: Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee

From: Chris Keane, Resident of Legislative District 2A

Date: January 29, 2026

Position: Favorable

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee,
My name is Chris Keane, and I am a resident of Legislative District 2A. I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 57.

I support this bill because it creates a pathway for civic excellence that is voluntary, low-cost, and deeply needed, all while respecting the autonomy of our local school systems. House Bill 57 allows school districts to participate in the Maryland Civic Excellence Program if they choose, but it does not mandate it. It does not force new requirements on districts that are already balancing competing priorities. Instead, it offers a flexible framework that districts can adopt at their own pace.

Critically, this program comes with no new mandated costs. The Maryland State Department of Education can develop the guidelines with existing resources, and because participation is optional, any local costs are discretionary. This ensures we can promote civic engagement without placing an unfunded burden on our schools.

For students, the impact of this recognition would be significant. Speaking from personal experience, I had a strong interest in civic engagement growing up, but did not know where to start. I eventually found my path through the Inaugural Maryland Corps/Service Year Option, but those opportunities came later. A program like this would have provided earlier direction and validation, helping students like me see that civic participation is a valued achievement in Maryland.

House Bill 57 sets a standard for civic readiness that strengthens our communities and reinforces our state's culture of service. Because it is voluntary and fiscally responsible, it offers high value with minimal risk.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 57.

Chris Keane

Hagerstown, Maryland

Legislative District 2A