

## **HB 284, Education - Maryland High School Diploma - Civics Test Requirement**

Favorable Testimony of Joshua Barlow  
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I would like to give an oral testimony which will state the following concerning HB 284:

My name is Joshua Barlow from Freestate Challenge Academy and I have had the unique opportunity to have taught Civics to high school students from every district in this State over the past eleven years. Many students I have taught come from Baltimore City and Prince George's County. They come to our school equipped with very little knowledge and even less understanding about our Constitution, voting, and even the basics of US History. When students learn the curriculum I developed they become engaged and feel like they can make a difference, like they belong. I have heard, "Mr Barlow, no one ever taught us this" hundreds of times.

A recent study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center (2016) showed that only 26% of high school graduates know what the three branches of Government are. We are reaching an epidemic on this extremely important issue.

Civics was taken out of the HSAs in Maryland in 2011. Since then the last time that public school students learn about civics, voting etc. is in the 9th grade. The importance of the subject often escapes a 14 year old. By the time he or she is of voting age and graduating high school it is vital to an informed and engaged society. Education has failed at this point on its most valued criteria. Other states have recently enacted similar legislation to address this problem. Pennsylvania passed a similar bill as this one last year and it passed almost unanimously.

Testing of STEM subjects has its merits but in putting emphasis on these ended up pushing Civics out of the picture. We are failing and this bill would cost next to nothing to implement monetarily.

The GED test requires knowledge about civics that most Maryland high school graduates lack. The purpose of the citizenship test, that immigrants must take, is to insure that Americans have an understanding about our history and laws in order to have a better functioning society, yet we are not equipping our own students with that information.

Please pass HB284 for Maryland students. I thank you for your time and the opportunity to help my fellow Marylanders.