



Testimony to Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**SENATE BILL 271 Education – Maryland Civic Engagement Program –  
Established**

March 1, 2023

Position: Support, with amendments

The Maryland Civic Education Coalition supports Senate Bill 271. Diploma seals benefit students and the community in numerous ways. Diploma seals can highlight important areas of study and encourage students to participate in learning and self-reflection that challenges them to go beyond what is required. Earning the diploma seal is an incentive for students and a signal to colleges and employers that a student has excelled in the area of civics.

A healthy democracy requires an informed and engaged electorate, and research<sup>1</sup> tells us that it is critical that students who participate in learning activities that include civic knowledge and skills to prepare them are more likely to engage in lifelong civic engagement. These core elements of effective civic education include learning about the historical foundation of our democracy, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and skills such as collaboration, cooperation, and consensus-building, and appreciation for a diversity of viewpoints. Students who engage in classroom-based activities and extracurricular activities including service-learning projects are more likely to become active citizens.

Therefore, we support SENATE BILL 271 which would empower school systems to honor student excellence in civic knowledge and participation by providing civic seals upon graduation from Maryland schools. SB 271 advances civic excellence by encouraging, but not requiring, local school systems to designate centers of civic engagement. Each center of civic engagement, in turn, would incentivize civic excellence through urging the adoption of commonsense, evidence-based practices like

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<sup>1</sup> [Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools;](https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/hs/hssstatesseal.asp)  
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student access to social studies courses, voter registration, participation in student service, and more.

Minor changes to SB 271, such as simplifying the point system to allow local school systems to enact a plan that is manageable and equitable would strengthen the bill. Allowing local school systems to design the school recognition program would allow for flexibility across the state. We also suggest changing the name to a Seal of Civic Excellence or Achievement to highlight the prestige of the honor.

**We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 271.**



The Maryland Civic Education Coalition is a cross-partisan organization committed to ensuring that all Maryland students have access to meaningful, comprehensive civic education and service-learning opportunities. We are an inclusive coalition of over 140 civic educators, young people, scholars, community members, and civic organizations from all 23 counties in Maryland and Baltimore City.

**[www.mdcivics.org](http://www.mdcivics.org)**