



SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY and the ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Senate Bill 271
Education – Maryland Civic Engagement Program – Established
March 1, 2023
Favorable

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on Senate Bill 271. The bill establishes the Maryland Civic Engagement Program as a voluntary program that promotes the civic readiness and engagement of students in Maryland’s public schools.

Civic education and civic engagement are foundational components to the world-class education that Maryland students deserve. This bill seeks to reward students who demonstrate knowledge of civics that is essential to participating in and protecting our democracy. Students would also be encouraged to register to vote and to engage in various civically responsible activities, such as peaceful demonstrations, Mock Trial, Model UN, and others. Under this bill, in addition to rewarding students, schools would be recognized for supporting students in achieving these goals.

Unfortunately, civic learning is currently on the ebb in our nation. Too few adults can name the three branches of government or describe the system of checks and balances. Far too few Americans trust our basic governmental institutions or even their fellow citizens. Fundamental civics education and positive experiences during a student’s formative years are crucial for developing civically engaged adults. As former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor and former Congressman Lee Hamilton wrote, “Since American federalism means that local, state, and federal governments share custody of education policy, restoring the civic mission of schools must be the responsibility of policymakers at every level.”

In 2021 USM joined dozens of other higher education institutions and organizations to announce a “Shared Commitment” to make “Democracy Learning a Top Priority for Postsecondary Education,” with two primary goals guiding our civic engagement work: 1) fostering an ethos of civic participation across all parts of all System institutions; and 2) identifying civic literacy as a core expectation for all students.

For these reasons the USM supports Senate Bill 271, to empower school districts to adopt civics seals for high school graduates who excel in civic knowledge and participation.



About the University System of Maryland

The University System of Maryland (USM)—one system made up of twelve institutions, three regional centers, and a central office—awards eight out of every ten bachelor’s degrees in the State of Maryland. The USM is governed by a Board of Regents, comprised of twenty-one members from diverse professional and personal backgrounds. The chancellor, Dr. Jay Perman, oversees and manages the operations of USM. However, each constituent institution is run by its own president who has authority over that university. Each of USM’s 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes Historically Black Colleges and Universities, comprehensive institutions, research universities, and the country’s largest public online institution.

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