



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, & THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SB 271 - Education – Maryland Civic Engagement Program – Established

POSITION: Support, with amendments

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) believes in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitutions of the United States and of Maryland. Sustaining our democratic form of government depends upon civic education as a key component of the democratic process.

SB 271 - Education – Maryland Civic Engagement Program – Established would empower local education agencies to establish a seal of civic engagement and a recognition program for schools which have a high participation rate among graduating seniors. We support SB 271 to incentivize students to invest more time and effort in civic education and service learning and elevate the overall value of civics in Maryland's public schools.

Civic education occurs in many settings beyond the school day, such as in sports, volunteer organizations, houses of worship, political rallies and campaigns, and at the polling place on Election Day. We support opportunities for students to put learning into practice such as in service-learning experiences, extra-curricular activities, school and community engagement, and opportunities to participate in school governance. We support strengthening service and volunteer opportunities as a pathway to stronger communities, improved mental health, improved academic outcomes, and a healthier democracy as individuals work in groups to solve issues they care about.

Ensuring the future of our democratic republic is dependent on fostering civic knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions. Maryland students who excel academically in social studies and exceed expectations in volunteer and service-learning should be recognized for their achievements. This recognition will serve as a concrete signal to colleges and employer that they will engage productively as members of the community.

We see room for improvement in the bill to ensure equity in all communities and for all students. We support SB 271 with amendments to ensure it is feasible for local education agencies to enact the program.

We urge a favorable report on SB 271.