



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 to establish a Seal of Civic Excellence for Maryland’s high school students. Diploma seals 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.

Our nation and state face significant internal threats from polarization and misinformation, with an electorate poorly trained to meet the challenges of self-governing in a constitutional democracy. High-quality civic learning and opportunities for all learners is a necessary antidote to ensure the health of our democratic republic. The civic strength of our country relies on prioritizing and investing in programs that inspire the next generation to want to become involved in their constitutional democracy and help to sustain our republic.

Research¹ tells us that students who participate in learning activities that include civic knowledge, skills, habits, and dispositions 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.

Therefore, we support Senate Bill 271 which would empower school systems to honor student achievement in civic learning and participation by providing a Seal of Civic Excellence.

¹ “The Republic is (Still) at Risk — and Civics is Part of the Solution” [link](#); “Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools” [link](#); California State Seal of Civic Engagement [link](#)

SB 271 advances civic excellence by encouraging, but not requiring, local school systems to establish a Seal of Civic Excellence for high school students and 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 student access to social studies courses, voter registration, participation in student service, and more.

Minor changes to SB 271 would strengthen the bill:

- simplify the point system to allow local school systems to enact a plan that is manageable and equitable;
- make the inclusion of a cord, medal, or other insignia optional to provide school systems flexibility to manage costs; and
- We respectfully request that our Maryland Civic Education Coalition Youth Advisory Council be included among the list of statewide organizations listed in section E. 2. iv.

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.

Join us online for our Maryland Civic Education & Engagement Leadership Summit: Strengthening Civics for All on Thursday, April 20th from 3:30 PM to 7:30 PM to celebrate civics and the Maryland Youth Service Awards!

www.mdcivics.org