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Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Maryland Civic Excellence Program (SB762)

Senate Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee: February 16, 2024, 9:00am

The functioning of our democracy depends on the next generation's engagement in civic affairs. According to the Fordham Institute, Maryland's civics curriculum is strong but has room for improvement.¹

Successful completion of civics courses in schools is associated with higher rates of volunteering, higher scores on the AP Government exam, and higher voter turnout among young adults.²

[SB762](#) would encourage civic engagement by creating a "Maryland Civic Excellence Program." Participating local school systems would have the opportunity to:

- Award a Seal of Civic Excellence to high school students who:
 - Excel on civics exams;
 - Succeed in civics courses (an A or a B in US History, Modern World History, and American Government); and
 - Serve their communities. (At least 30 of 75 total Student Service-Learning hours must focus on community and civic engagement.)
- Designate a public school as a Center of Civic Excellence if at least 50% of its students have earned a Seal.

Students who apply and earn a Seal would get a cord, a medal, or an insignia on their diploma. Schools would receive a banner, a Governor's citation, or a citation from the MD State Department of Education.

Eleven other states (AZ, CA, GA, NV, NY, OH, OK, PA, and VA) either already have or are in the process of implementing a Civic Seal Program. Let's follow in their footsteps and reward future generations for their involvement in our democracy!

This bill is similar to [Senator Ready's 2023 bill](#), which passed the Senate unanimously last year. This year, he and I are working together to emphasize the bipartisan support of this endeavor. Differences from last year's bill include:

- Simplifying the application review process by removing the point system-- thus reducing cost to local school systems;

¹ Stern, Jeremy, Alison Brody, José Gregory, Stephen Griffith, Jonathan Pulvers, David Griffith, Amber Foreword, and Chester Finn. "The State of State Standards for Civics and U.S. History in 2021 about the Fordham Institute Suggested Citation," June 2021. <https://fordhaminstitute.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/20210623-state-state-standards-civics-and-us-history-20210.pdf#page=15>.

² Shapiro, Sarah, and Catherine Brown. "The State of Civics Education." Center for American Progress, February 21, 2018. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/state-civics-education/>.

- Removing AP exam scores as a metric of success so as to not unfairly penalize students whose schools do not offer such courses;
- Striking participation in extracurricular activities as a requirement in order to ensure equitable access to the Seal for all students, including those low-income students who may not have time to participate in related extracurricular activities; and
- Delinking voter registration from the Seal so as to avoid disadvantaging students who may not be eligible for voter registration before their high school graduation.

I urge a favorable report on SB762.