



Maryland Youth Advisory Council
c/o Governor's Office of Crime
Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services
100 Community Place,
Crownsville, MD 21032

Grace Minakowski, *Chair*
Will O'Donnell, *Vice-Chair*
Folashade Epebinu, *Secretary*

March 25, 2024

Re: SB 762 | Education - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council prides itself on being a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders who serve as a voice for youth in the state of Maryland. As leaders in our communities, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to address relevant issues by influencing legislation, spreading public awareness and serving as a liaison between youth and policymakers regarding issues facing youth.

SB 762 supports the ongoing progress of motivating youth to be civically engaged, directly promoting civic readiness for our future leaders. Despite the evident dedication of students across the state, their civic contributions often go unrecognized. Being civically engaged benefits all corners of a young person's life, whether that be in academic performance or their social-emotional well-being¹. As demonstrated through the Maryland Youth Advisory Council, Maryland Civics and Education Coalition, and many others, engaging in the political process at a young age helps build an understanding of their surroundings, issues facing their community, and mental development.² Even with these clear benefits, Maryland continues to face a decrease in youth participation in civic initiatives. **SB 762** ensures the continuation of youth involvement in civics by providing not only motivation but acknowledgement of actions that will lead Maryland into a brighter future—maintaining the integrity of civic engagement. Maryland already applauds students for their academics or sports with medals and other forms of support, and we must honor those civically engaged with the same level of support.

SB 762 provides recognition to students who promote “civic readiness and civic engagement” in school systems across Maryland. Furthermore supporting schools as a whole that accommodate civic learning and serve as a “Center of Civic Excellence”—providing much-needed incentives to promote a wider spread of civic engagement and education.

¹ “Why Is Youth Civic Engagement Important?” *CIRCLE*, circle.tufts.edu/understanding-youth-civic-engagement/why-it-important#:~:text=Youth%20engagement%20can%20lead%20to,a%20source%20of%20economic%20mobility. Accessed 15 Feb. 2024.

² Conner, Jerusha, Michael Posner, and Bright Nsowaa. 2022. “The Relationship between Student Voice and Student Engagement in Urban High Schools.” *The Urban Review* 54 (5). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-022-00637-2>.



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SB 762 not only uplifts individual youth civic engagement but also highlights schools that promote collective civic engagement across Maryland. The Council is in support of **SB 762**, as it aligns with the Council's Legislative Platform supporting:

- a. Youth involvement in the creation and revision of legislation impacting youth. (Article I. Clause D); and
- b. Opportunities for youth to be a part of community and statewide decisions. (Article I. Clause F).

SB 762 reflects, acknowledges, and *admires* the dedication youth have demonstrated toward civic engagement; for themselves, their peers, and their future. The Council believes it is the duty of the Maryland General Assembly to pass legislation that will elevate, protect, and advance the youth generations to come. For these reasons, the Council supports **SB 762** and respectfully requests a favorable report from the committee. We thank you for your consideration of our position.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "G. Minakowski", written in a cursive style.

Grace Minakowski, Chair
Maryland Youth Advisory Council