

**Committees:** Ways and Means

**Testimony on:** HB0072 - Education - Maryland Civic Excellence Program - Established

**Position:** Favorable

26 January 2025

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and the members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Ella Wan, and I'm the President of the Montgomery County Junior Council. I support House Bill 0072, which would establish the Maryland Civic Excellence Program.

As a student who has been actively engaged in civic programs throughout my educational career, I have seen firsthand the transformative impact civic engagement can have on students, schools, and communities. This program is a much-needed step toward creating a future where every student in Maryland is equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make real contributions to their communities.

Last year, I had the privilege of presenting at the Montgomery County Public Schools Next Generation Leadership Day. This event empowered over 400 4th and 5th graders with the tools to become better leaders and introduced them to the world of student advocacy. Watching these students, some as young as nine years old, speak up about issues they cared about and brainstorm solutions was nothing short of inspiring. It was a vivid reminder that civic engagement is not just for adults—it starts in classrooms and grows with opportunities just like this. Programs like the Maryland Civic Excellence Program would institutionalize these life-changing experiences by encouraging schools to prioritize civic readiness and by recognizing students and schools that excel in this area.

I can also attest to how programs like this foster a stronger sense of community. When I've worked with my peers on civic projects, I've seen how collective action strengthens bonds, teaches empathy, and inspires leadership. By designating schools as Centers of Civic Excellence, this program incentivizes educators to integrate civics into their curriculum and culture, ensuring that every student, regardless of background, has access to these vital experiences.

This bill is more than just a piece of legislation —it's a promise. It's a promise to Maryland students that their voices matter, their efforts are seen, and their future is supported. I urge this committee to pass a favorable report on HB0072 to invest in the civic readiness of Maryland's next generation. I yield my time.

Thank you,

Ella Wan

Neelsville Middle School

Montgomery County

[ellamwan@gmail.com](mailto:ellamwan@gmail.com)