

House of Delegates Ways & Means Committee
SB8 Education – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established
Bill Hearing Date: March 19, 2025
Position: Support



Dear Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Sharon Green, and I am a resident of Baltimore County. I am writing to express my strong support for SB8/HB72, which seeks to establish the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence program.

As parent, teacher, and school-based Social Studies Department Chair, I have seen firsthand the importance of civic education in shaping responsible, informed citizens. Unfortunately, civic engagement often takes a backseat in our educational system, and this bill offers a critical opportunity to change that.

The Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence has widespread support from diverse stakeholders, including students, educators, civic organizations, and state education leaders. It is also part of a growing national movement—many states have already adopted similar cost-effective initiatives to strengthen civic education and encourage youth engagement.

The Seal of Civic Excellence will:

- ★ Encourage students to engage more deeply in civic education, leadership, and service.
- ★ Highlight the importance of staying informed on local, state, and national issues.
- ★ Inspire schools to integrate more civics into their curricula and recognize student achievement.

Working in Maryland as a Social Studies Department Chair and social studies teacher for many years, I am all too familiar with how hard it is to convince even the most well-intentioned and dedicated school administrations to make civic learning a formal part of the school curriculum. With such a huge focus on literacy and math test scores, there just isn't the incentive to carve out the time in student schedules given that civic learning is not tested and therefore not asked about by most parents. However, I would argue that it IS tested every day of our lives and is the most important content schools can bring to their students. **We all live in this country and are collectively responsible for maintaining this democracy.** We adults must pass on the knowledge of how our government works and how citizens contribute to maintain it if we have any hope that future generations will have the tools to engage, participate, stay informed, and get involved in supporting issues that affect them. **Establishing the MD Civic Excellence Program will create exactly the incentive that many school administrators need to make this important subject a priority.** Whether schools create a civics course, a civics club, or integrate civic learning throughout other social studies courses the result will be a net positive for our students and our country.

Additionally, it should be noted that it is well established that **social studies instruction IS literacy** instruction and that reading content-specific material grows students' background knowledge, a critical component of comprehension, as well as allows for opportunities to practice specific reading and writing skills that there isn't always time for in a typical English class as those are often dominated by novel studies and grammar lessons. **This bill promotes carving out dedicated time for focusing on these important literacy skills.**

Finally, in 2025 is there a more important skill to teach children than how to have civic discourse and purposefully engage with ideas about our country that may be different than our own? **If we expect our children to take the reins one day, then knowledge in both the content of civics education as well as the processes are critical.** In my 20 years in the education field, I don't think there could be anything with more obvious value than increasing access to civic education in schools, and I hope you feel the same way. The future of Maryland and the future of our democracy depends on your vote to pass this bill.

In conclusion, SB8/HB72 is a smart, cost-effective investment in the future of Maryland's democracy. It has bipartisan support, no additional cost to the state, and a proven track record of success in other states. By supporting this bill, the committee will help ensure that Maryland students are recognized for their civic leadership and prepared to actively contribute to their communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sharon Green
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