



HB 575 - Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Civic Engagement
Senate Education, Energy & The Environment Committee

April 7, 2026

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is proud to offer our enthusiastic support for this important legislation. As a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding the quality and availability of afterschool and summer learning for school-aged youth, MOST also proudly serves as the backbone organization for the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools and MENTOR Maryland | DC.

Over the past decade, we have been inspired by a remarkable and growing wave of youth leadership, civic organizing, and democratic engagement across our state. Young people are showing up eager to participate, to be heard, and to shape the policies that affect their lives and families. This bill recognizes and honors that spirit, and we are deeply grateful for the vision and leadership behind it.

Because much of the work of our legislative bodies occurs during school hours, students often face a difficult choice: engage in democracy or protect their attendance records. That should never be a choice any young person is forced to make. Testifying before a committee, attending a hearing, or participating in civic activities is not time away from learning — it *is* learning. It is democracy made tangible and real in a way no textbook can replicate.

MOST knows this firsthand. Each year, we bring young people to Washington, D.C., for the "Afterschool for All Challenge," where they meet directly with Maryland's congressional representatives. We provide excuse notes to participating students' schools, yet whether that absence is honored remains inconsistent, left entirely to the discretion of individual schools and districts. This bill would help bring the consistency and clarity that students, families, and educators deserve.

We wholeheartedly agree that students must never be discouraged from civic participation out of fear of penalty or negative consequences on their records. Absences for civic engagement should be treated as lawful and excused. We are tremendously grateful to the bill's sponsor for championing this cause and for understanding that investing in youth civic engagement is investing in the future of our democracy. This legislation reflects a deep commitment to young people and to the principle that every student's voice matters. We enthusiastically urge the Committee to issue a favorable report and advance this bill.

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