



**Board of Education of Howard County  
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
April 7, 2026**

**Board of Education  
of Howard County**

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**HB0575: UNFAVORABLE  
Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Civic Engagement**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Civic Engagement** as a mandate on local school system policy.

HB0575, as originally introduced, requires local boards of education to adopt an attendance policy that treats a student's absence as excused if they are participating in civic activities during a regular session of the Maryland General Assembly. The policy must excuse students who testify (either virtually or in person) at a General Assembly committee hearing or conduct civic engagement activities, such as meeting with legislators and advocating for or against legislation or policy issues. Furthermore, the policies and procedures adopted by the local board must allow a student to be excused for at least 15 hours or two school days to perform these activities. If a local attendance policy requires a note to excuse an absence, it must authorize an appropriate representative to provide the necessary documentation or note for the student.

The current Howard County Public School System ([HCPSS Policy 9010 Attendance](#)) includes a broad definition for civic engagement, which is listed as an example of a discretionary absence. The [Implementation Procedures](#) stipulate that students need to submit the request for such an absence at least a week in advance to have it be considered for a lawful absence. If HB0575 passed, HCPSS' policy would likely cover the instances envisioned by the bill within the current allotment for up to three days of discretionary leave, but may need language updates to explicitly grant a minimum of 15 hours or two school days for General Assembly testimony. Process changes beyond the policy may include how students can submit proof of engagement from third parties (legislative offices or advocacy groups) rather than just a signature from a parent.

As amended in the House, HB0575 broadened the definition of civic engagement beyond the scope of the General Assembly, which better aligns with the broader use of civic engagement built into the current HCPSS policy which was intended to be as inclusive as possible for activities such as voting, volunteerism, advocacy, testimony, and peaceful demonstrations. The new language that calls for excused absences for civic engagement, and the Page Program, to be in addition to any excused absences under existing policies of a local board means HCPSS would be required to allow for additional absence



beyond those under discretionary. A potential unintended consequence of this language would be the slippery slope of other types of required excused absences being continually added to statute, without a holistic lens towards the impact on student attendance.

As a legislative priority, the Board supports local decision making in the development of policy that accounts for a balance of educational practices, available resources, public input, and local accountability. While HB0575 aligns with the intent of HCPSS Policy 9010, it remains a mandate on local board's authority to set policies that are directly responsive to its citizenry.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report on HB0575 from this Committee.