



**Testimony in SUPPORT of
House Bill 575: Public Schools – Student Attendance – Excused Absences for Civic Engagement**

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: Support

April 7, 2026

At Strong Schools Maryland, we work to support the faithful implementation and full funding of the promises legislated through the landmark Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The Blueprint envisions a public school system that is built upon the foundation of equity, supports all students' success, and removes barriers to opportunities. As a result, **Strong Schools Maryland offers favorable testimony in support of House Bill 575 – Public Schools – Student Attendance – Excused Absences for Civic Engagement**

We strongly support students engaging in civic life. Testifying before the General Assembly, meeting with legislators, and advocating on policy issues are powerful learning experiences. Public schools should encourage civic engagement through coursework, extracurricular opportunities, and partnerships that ensure students from all backgrounds can participate meaningfully and equitably.

We appreciate and support the amendments to expand the bill to include civic engagement with any public facing body rather than solely the General Assembly, as this would allow for the encouragement of civic engagement at every level of government, local and State. Furthermore, we also support striking the language that would mandate the exclusion of the excused absence for civic engagement from the calculation of chronic absenteeism. Now, the statute explicitly designates civic engagement as an excused absence, requires that students be allowed to make up work without penalty, and prohibits truancy referrals or disciplinary consequences tied to these absences while preserving alignment with state and federal definitions of chronic absenteeism.

We urge the committee to also consider equity in the implementation of this bill. Not all students have equal access to transportation, adult support, or flexible schedules that make legislative engagement possible. If civic participation is to be encouraged, schools and districts should ensure that opportunities are structured and accessible at no cost so participation does not depend on family resources or connections. The proposed legislation takes a step towards protecting and encouraging students to civically engage with their communities.

For these reasons, Strong Schools Maryland urges the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 575.

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