

**BILL:** House Bill 575  
**TITLE:** Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Civic Engagement  
**HEARING DATE:** April 7, 2026  
**POSITION:** Oppose  
**COMMITTEE:** Education, Energy, and the Environment  
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all the state’s local boards of education, **opposes House Bill 575 Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Civic Engagement**. Although MABE supports student civic engagement, excused absences still count when measuring chronic absenteeism. As a result, extending the definition of excused absences to include civic engagement will potentially increase rates of chronic absenteeism.

Chronic absenteeism is defined at both the state and federal level as a student missing ten percent of the school year. This definition, used by most states, includes all absences—both excused and unexcused—without exception. The purpose of tracking chronic absenteeism is to understand the full scope of missed instructional time and its impact on student learning. As stated by MSDE in written testimony on HB 575 in the House, “Regardless of the reason, when a student is absent, even for civic engagement, they are not present for classroom instruction. Maintaining a uniform calculation ensures clarity, comparability, and a shared understanding of attendance data across the state, while still honoring the value of civic participation.”

Despite our opposition, we do recognize the importance of ensuring students understand and value civic participation. Schools can organize field trips to see the General Assembly or other public facing bodies in action, meet with legislators, and even provide opportunities to testify. Schools could include writing testimony on specific bills as a part of their curriculum, teach students how to submit the testimony, and then watch hearings during class time. This is civic engagement that does not require missing instructional time. Additionally, there are several programs that already exist in Maryland for students related to civic engagement, including:

- [Maryland Student Civics Program](#): This program offers first-hand engagement with public officials to encourage youth participation in their communities. It runs two 10-week sessions per year (fall and spring semesters), open to any Maryland high school student who completes a short online application.
- [School-Based Service Learning \(Statewide\)](#): MSDE has developed service-learning units for high school students that include projects like lobbying on public issues, organizing voter turnout efforts, hosting candidate forums, and running soup kitchens tied to government and social issues classes. Many counties — including

Harford, Howard, Carroll, and Washington — have their own award-winning programs.

- [Maryland General Assembly Page Program](#): This is real-world experience students participate in — pages assist with legislative operations in Annapolis during the General Assembly session.

These are just a few examples of ways that students can participate in civic engagement, without having to alter student attendance policies through HB 575. We encourage the General Assembly to oppose HB 575, and instead, encourage school systems to take advantage of incorporating civic engagement into curricula, so students do not have to miss instructional time to participate in the democratic process.

For these reasons, MABE kindly requests an **unfavorable report on HB 575**.