



**Maryland High School  
*Democrats***

**Legislative Testimony**

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**Senate of Maryland  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

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

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Daniel Cornitcher, and I serve as the Development Director for the Maryland High School Democrats (MDHSD) and as National Committee Coordinator for the High School Democrats of America (HSDA). I am writing in strong support of House Bill 575.

Students across Maryland care deeply about the issues being discussed in this building. Many want to testify, meet with legislators, and take part in advocacy, but too often they are forced to weigh that participation against school attendance policies and academic consequences.

I want to acknowledge that I have been fortunate. My school has been supportive of the advocacy work I have been involved in, and that support has made a real difference in my ability to participate. That is not the reality for every student.

I have worked with students across the state who do not have that same level of support. Some of our core members were unable to attend our Federal Advocacy Day in Washington last November because missing school would have had academic consequences they could not afford. At our State Advocacy Day on February 19 in Annapolis, several students who did attend struggled to secure make-up testing for exams scheduled that same day. Others had to leave early or arrive late, missing parts of the experience because of school-day obligations.

These are not isolated issues. They shape who is able to participate.

Even when students are willing to make the effort to show up, whether for part of the day or the entire day, they deserve to be supported in doing so. No student should have to choose between engaging in the democratic process and staying on track academically.

House Bill 575 helps address that. By guaranteeing excused absences for civic engagement, it removes a barrier that currently discourages participation.

There are already enough obstacles. Transportation to Annapolis can be difficult, especially for students traveling from farther parts of the state. There are financial and logistical challenges that limit access. At the same time, the Maryland General Assembly conducts much of its work during school hours. Hearings, sessions, and committee meetings often take place in the middle of the school day. Even virtual testimony requires students to step away from class.

This bill does not remove every barrier students in advocacy face. However, it does address one that the state has direct control over.

On a personal level, I have also had the opportunity to serve as a Page with the Maryland General Assembly, which gave me a level of access to the legislative process that many students will never have. For most students, testifying or meeting with a legislator is their primary way of engaging with their government. Those opportunities should be accessible, and they should not come with fear of academic penalties.

Advocacy in Annapolis already requires time, planning, and effort. Removing this one barrier makes it more possible for students across Maryland to take part.

It is my hope, and the hope of MDHSD, that House Bill 575 is passed so that all students, not just those with supportive schools, flexible circumstances, or privileged backgrounds, have a fair opportunity to engage in the democratic process.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

**Daniel W. Cornitcher**

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