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DEPUTY SPEAKER PRO TEM

Appropriations Committee

Subcommittees

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Oversight Committee on Pensions

Joint Committee on Administrative,
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Delegate Dana Jones
Before the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

In Support of HB 662
Election Law - Election Judges - Compensation for Public School Students
February 18th 2026, 1:00 pm

For the record, I am Delegate Dana Jones, representing District 30A in the House of Delegates.

Chair Wells, Vice-Chair Kerr, and members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee, I am here today to introduce HB 662, Election Law - Election Judges - Compensation for Public School Students. The purpose of this legislation is to allow public school students who serve as election judges to be eligible for both compensation and student service learning hours. This legislation will help our local boards of elections address significant election judge recruiting issues and serve as an important tool to improve civic engagement among young Marylanders.

As touched on by The Maryland Association of Election Officials in their written testimony, the inability to recruit the requisite amount of election officials is the greatest challenge faced by our LBE's. The recruitment issues in recent elections are well documented. In 2022, Baltimore City was down 700 poll workers with just weeks left until the general election.¹ In 2024, Anne Arundel County was down roughly 400 election judges with just three weeks left until election day.² As today's election environment and discourse continues to worsen, election judge recruitment is only getting more difficult for our local boards. By allowing high school students to receive both SSL hours and compensation for their time, a vital pathway is opened to incentivize youth election participation that can recruit judges into the future. However, this

¹ <https://www.wmar2news.com/homepage-showcase/700-poll-workers-needed-ahead-of-election-day-baltimore-boe-continues-to-prepare>

² <https://cnsmaryland.org/2024/10/18/poll-workers-are-in-high-demand-especially-maryland-republicans/>

change will not just benefit our local election boards, but can also provide a significant positive externality to civic engagement. Furthermore, when everyone except students are paid to serve as an election judge, we create inequality built into the system. Opportunities meant to engage young people instead end up favoring only those who can afford to work without pay. Many students, myself included, simply cannot choose experience over income when paying bills or supporting family is a reality.

Today, America is in a civics literacy crisis. According to a 2024 study from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, more than 70% of Americans fail a basic civic literacy class.³ The impacts on our society are both dramatic and self-evident, regardless of your political affiliation. Additionally, research has shown that exposure to civics and election information at the high school level directly improves perceptions of voting and voting efficacy in young adulthood. According to a 2020 study from Tufts University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, young voters' attitudes and perceptions of voting are improved by more than 100% when they were encouraged to be involved in high school.⁴ The incentive provided in this legislation will help engage our youth and expose them to the electoral process, verifiably boosting their perceptions of voting and improving civic literacy in our State.

Serving as an election judge, and participating in the election process, provides judges with first hand experience of how our system really works. This public service is truly unique compared to other options to fulfill SSL hours. As our local boards struggle to recruit enough election officials, it is vital that we recognize *all* students for their civil service as an election judge regardless of their receipt of compensation for their time.

With that, I respectfully urge the Committee to move favorably on HB 662

Thank you,



Delegate Dana Jones

³ <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/civics/new-study-finds-alarming-lack-of-civic-literacy-among-americans>

⁴ <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/youth-who-learned-about-voting-high-school-more-likely-become-informed-and-engaged>