

HB0575 SUPPORT

Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Civic Engagement

Saanvi Venumbaka - Hammond High School Student

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Saanvi Venumbaka, and I am a student from Hammond High School, where I serve as the Sophomore Vice President. I am on the executive board for the Howard County Association of Student Councils (HCASC) and am a member of the Civic Engagement Committee in the Maryland Association of Student Councils (MASC).

As a proud student who continuously participates in civic engagement activities, I have begun attending statewide advocacy efforts as well. One challenge I have noticed is figuring out how I am supposed to leave school in the middle of the day to participate. I am a student who believes that experience in real-world activities is just as important as school education. Through HCASC and MASC, I have met many passionate students who regularly testify at their county boards and the Maryland General Assembly.

With the passing of bill HB0575, more students will also have the opportunity to gain valuable experience and skills such as public speaking, policy analysis, and civic literacy. Testifying allows students to take part in civic engagement activities and expand their voices and ideas to the state level. By allowing two days of excused absences, HB0575 would enable more students to participate in these meaningful experiences.

Additionally, bill HB0575 would help close the equity gap between schools. Some schools across the county are more lenient with excused absences, while others are not. This bill would ensure that all students have equal opportunities to participate in civic engagement activities.

Not only would this bill have short-term benefits, but it would also create broader civic impacts among today's youth. With greater opportunities to get involved in civic activities, there will be increased youth engagement in government.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to issue a favorable report on bill HB0575. Thank you for your time and consideration.