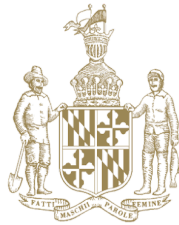


JHEANELLE WILKINS  
Legislative District 20  
Montgomery County

Chair, Ways and Means Committee

Rules and Executive Nominations  
Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates  
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

**House Bill 575 - Public Schools – Student Attendance – Excused Absences for Civic Engagement**

Dear colleagues,

I am pleased to present **House Bill 575 – Public Schools – Student Attendance – Excused Absences for Civic Engagement**, legislation that affirms civic participation is a vital part of student learning and ensures the youth of Maryland are not penalized academically for engaging in our democratic process.

HB 575 requires that Maryland State Department of Education and local school boards treat student absences as excused when students testify before the MD General Assembly. The bill guarantees 15 hours or two school days for these activities and ensures these absences are lawful and excluded from chronic absenteeism statistics.

HB 575 addresses an existing gap observed within Maryland’s schools with civic absences depending on district discretion. HB 575 establishes a consistent statewide standard so that civic engagement is accessible to all students, not solely those whose schools already offer flexibility or accommodations.

Research consistently shows that early involvement in civic participation increases sustained engagement in voting and community leadership. To build a stronger, more representative democracy, we must empower our youth to engage in civic participation without fear of academic consequences. House Bill 575 ensures that Maryland students can learn democracy by embodying its essence in practice.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to give a **favorable report** for **House Bill 575 – Public Schools – Student Attendance – Excused Absences for Civic Engagement**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jheanelle Wilkins".

Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins