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TESTIMONY ON HB#/0575 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Civic Engagement

TO: Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB#/0575, Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Civic Engagement

Our youth are seeing the destruction of the rule of law and the treatment of immigrants by this administration. They are reacting to this throughout Maryland public schools. As reported by NBC4 News on January 20, 2026 *Hundreds of DC-area students walk out of class to protest ICE - On Tuesday, thousands of students nationwide protested the Trump administration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and enforcement actions that in recent weeks have turned violent.*¹

WJZ TV reported that *Hundreds of Maryland students protest ICE operations with school walkouts*²

This bill recognizes that our youth are engaged and need to be encouraged to continue civic participation. To facilitate that, this bill will require the Maryland Department of Education ... and each county board [to] adopt an attendance policy for public school students that treats a student's absence as excused if, during a regular session of the general assembly, the student:

1. testifies virtually or in person at a hearing of any committee of the general assembly
2. conducts civic engagement activities, including: house bill 575
3. meeting with legislators
4. advocating for or against legislation and policy issues
5. and other activities deemed to be civic engagement by the department and the applicable county board.

If the attendance policy requires a note to excuse an absence, the policy shall authorize an appropriate representative to provide a note or reasonable documentation to excuse the student's absence. An excused absence under this section is a lawful absence and may not be included in a calculation of chronic absenteeism for the student or the school.

¹ <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/hundreds-of-dc-area-students-walk-out-of-class-to-protest-ice/4045348/>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCifP4pX7W8>

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These goals will be met by this bill requiring the State Department of Education and each county board of education to adopt an attendance policy to excuse certain absences for civic engagement by public school students, subject to certain policies and procedures.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#/0575.