



Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 575–*
Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Civic
Engagement
Ways & Means Committee
February 18, 2026

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish organizations, synagogues and schools throughout the region. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on justice, equity, mutual respect and safety. We work throughout the region to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents on a non-sectarian basis and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports House Bill 575 which requires the State Department of Education and each county board to adopt an attendance policy regarding excused absences for public school students who are engaged in civic activities.

This bill came to the attention of our agency during our annual Advocacy Day, which was held on February 3, 2026, with more than 300 constituents from the Jewish Community across the state. We were grateful for the opportunity to speak with Chair Wilkins. During the meeting, our D-20 constituents had an opportunity to advocate for our priorities but also to hear about legislation that was important to the Delegate. One bill that she brought to our attention was HB 575, which sparked the interest of two students who had attended the advocacy meeting. They wanted to know how they could support this legislation and subsequently submitted written testimony. As much as students would like to get firsthand experiences in the Maryland General Assembly, including a potential “follow your legislator for the day” event, it is not easy to get an excused absence.

The JCRC is motivated to include more students in our advocacy event because we feel they should, and they want to, participate in our democratic process. Their voices matter and they are our future leaders. Unfortunately, it is a tremendous challenge for them to get an excused absence to attend; therefore, this legislation could be the solution to this obstacle. For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report for House Bill 575.

