

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 575
Ways and Means

(Delegate Wilkins, *et al.*)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Public Schools - Student Attendance - Excused Absences for Civic Engagement

This bill requires each local board of education to adopt an attendance policy for public school students that treats a student’s absence as excused if, during a regular session of a public facing body, the student (1) testifies at a hearing of a public facing body; (2) conducts civic engagement activities, as defined by the bill; or (3) participates in the Maryland General Assembly Page Program. Attendance policies and procedures under the bill must authorize a student to be excused for at least 15 hours or two school days to testify or conduct civic engagement activities, or the length of time of the page program. Excused absences for testifying or conducting civic engagement activities under the bill must be in addition to any excused absences under existing policies or procedures of the local board. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill affects only local school board operations.

Local Effect: None. Local school systems can alter attendance policies and track student civic engagement, as defined by the bill, using existing resources.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: “Public facing body” means an entity that (1) meets to set or carry out public policy; (2) is subject to the Open Meetings Act; and (3) consists of members who are elected or appointed by the Governor or a local executive authority.

Civic engagement activities under the bill include (1) meeting with members of the public facing body and (2) contributing to the consideration, development, or implementation of policy issues. If the attendance policy requires a note to excuse an absence, the policy must authorize an appropriate representative to provide a note or reasonable documentation to excuse the absence. A local board must adopt policies and procedures to carry out the bill's requirements.

Current Law: A child age 5 to 17 must attend public school regularly unless the child is otherwise receiving regular, thorough instruction at an alternative setting (*i.e.*, a private or home school). An individual who has legal custody of a child age 5 to 15 and fails to see that the child attends school is guilty of a misdemeanor. Compulsory attendance does not apply to specified individuals, including, among others, individuals who have obtained a high school diploma or GED, who is married or in military service, or an individual who is severely ill and requires home or hospital instruction.

Absences from school are classified as lawful or unlawful. COMAR specifies the conditions that constitute a lawful absence from school. Among these conditions are (1) death in the immediate family; (2) illness of the student; (3) pregnancy and parenting conditions; (4) court summons; (5) hazardous weather conditions; (6) work approved or sponsored by the school; (7) observance of a religious holiday; (8) State emergency; (9) suspension; (10) lack of authorized transportation; or (11) other emergencies or circumstances which, in the judgement of the local superintendent or designee, constitutes a good and sufficient cause for absence from school. An absence, including absence for any portion of the day, for any reason other than those cited as lawful are presumed to be unlawful and may constitute truancy.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City Public Schools; Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Frederick County Public Schools; Montgomery County Public Schools; Prince George's County Public Schools; St. Mary's County Public Schools; Wicomico County Public Schools; Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Legislative Services

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