



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Education
In support of H.716 An Act creating an inclusive vision for implementing civics studies
(CIVICS)**

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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, representing 47 local Leagues across the state, supports H.716 An Act creating an inclusive vision for implementing civics studies (CIVICS). This bill is designed to improve the implementation of the 2018 legislation for civics that established a Civics Project Trust Fund and that required students from Grade 8 – 12 to do at least two student-led civics projects during that grade span. The original 2018 legislation created opportunities for professional development to support teacher implementation of this legislation. But the Covid-19 pandemic has delayed implementation for many schools and students. This bill seeks to add support and incentives and more effective coordinated leadership to support the implementation of student-led civics projects. I would like to call your attention to four specific features of this bill that will support effective implementation and explain why they are helpful based on my experience as a retired Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction.

1. The Civic Project Trust Fund would be required to focus on underserved communities across the commonwealth including school districts with high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students. First grant cycles to school districts have had applications that far exceed the money available and this would prioritize district applications by need.
2. The allowable uses of the Civic Project Trust Fund would expand to include stipends for teachers and administrators to support their professional training in civics and student-led civics projects. Stipends will make it possible for teachers and administrators for whom civics and student-led civics projects might be considered an extra assignment to receive compensation to recognize their willingness to assume this extra work and pay for training experiences that would not normally be a part of their professional development.
3. Hand in hand with feature 2, is the notion that school districts should be required to designate at least one teacher or administrator to lead the successful implementation of student-led civics projects for each district school serving grade 8 and each public high school. Districts may designate one administrator for multiple schools. Simply put, this is important because curriculum projects happen when the support conditions for implementation are guided by a designated point person. Most school districts in Massachusetts are small districts that may not have a curriculum leadership structure, so someone needs to be the designated point person. In large school districts, there is often curriculum leadership but the span of curriculum responsibilities may be so large that a designated point person for student led civics projects is necessary.
4. The fourth supportive feature of this bill calls for DESE, in collaboration with the Massachusetts civic learning coalition and civics education researchers, to develop a “civics seal” to award to school districts and individual schools that show excellence



in producing and promoting civics projects and to develop a website to showcase school projects from schools receiving the civic seal. This would create an incentive for schools to ramp up their implementation and it will also provide a showcase of exemplars that will help other schools by presenting good models of student work.

In summary, this array of incentives, supports and requirement for effective administrative coordination will protect the investment the legislature has already made in the Civics Project Trust Fund. Schools have many curriculum requirements and I speak from experience when I tell you that those requirements that have effective support, incentives and leadership are much more likely to be implemented in meaningful and successful ways. Civic education is important. This bill communicates and reaffirms to schools that it is and that they need to take it seriously. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts urges you to report this bill out favorably.