

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2021 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 945 (Senator Bailey)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Calvert County Board of Education - Public Meetings - Public Comment

This bill requires the Calvert County Board of Education to provide an opportunity for public comment on specified matters at each public meeting. The bill allows the public to provide comment on (1) education; (2) testing; (3) attendance; (4) school athletics; (5) school transportation; (6) school boundaries; and (7) actions related to the administration of Calvert County Public Schools. Each commenter must be given at least three uninterrupted minutes to provide comment and may submit comments in writing. The board must include written comments in the minutes for the meeting for which the comments were submitted. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2021.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: Calvert County Public Schools can implement the bill's procedural changes with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: The Calvert County Board of Education must meet at least once each month. Except for actions taken in closed session for specified purposes, the board must take actions at a public meeting and make record of the meeting and all actions public.

Local Fiscal Effect: The Calvert County Board of Education already allows a member of the public to comment at public meetings. Generally, the board allows unlimited comments, but only allows three minutes of comment for individuals and five minutes for those representing an organization. Commenters must sign in and wait their turn in the audience. The board's only restrictions to topics on which an individual may testify are (1) individual personnel issues; (2) complaints identifying individual students; (3) matters that are on appeal; and (4) advertising or solicitation for products and/or services.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some additional restrictions are temporarily in place. Specifically, commenters must pre-register on the board's website and only the first 10 registrants may join meetings to comment. Commenters also must wear a mask at meetings and wait in their car rather than the audience for their turn to comment.

In 2018 to 2019, 7 public board meetings had no speakers, and 13 had speakers. Most meetings with commenters had less than 10, though 1 meeting received 20 public commenters for an issue of public safety. The board currently does not transcribe the testimony of public commenters into meeting minutes.

The bill generally codifies existing practice of the board of education. However, transcribing public comments may require minimal additional staff support for most meetings. For meetings with a large number of citizen comments, the board may require a meaningful amount of additional staff support.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: HB 1357 (Delegate Clark) - Ways and Means.

Information Source(s): Calvert County Public Schools, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 17, 2021
rh/hlb

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