

Re: Bill HB138

Dear Committee Members:

I strongly urge you to support HB183. The true sharing of public information and accessibility is an essential part of our democracy. Other states in which I've worked as a reporter make it much easier to find public records than does the state of Maryland. When submitting records requests to different entities, including Baltimore County public schools and the Baltimore Police Department, it has been next to impossible to secure public information records. I recently encountered a cost estimate of more than \$49,000 for copies of several emails, among a few individuals, over several months at the Baltimore police department (BPD).

The essential elements of this bill are necessary for Maryland to move into the 21st-century and to be a progressive and transparent state (see excerpt below). Possible rebuttals claiming this would increase agency costs is not sufficient. As I mentioned, other states do this regularly. If responses and annual reports are posted by various agency document units, personnel would also not have as many requests on similar items to re-process.

4-104.

(A) EACH OFFICIAL CUSTODIAN SHALL ADOPT A POLICY OF PROACTIVE DISCLOSURE OF PUBLIC RECORDS THAT ARE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION UNDER THIS TITLE.

(B) THE POLICY ADOPTED UNDER SUBSECTION (A) OF THIS SECTION MAY:

(1) VARY AS APPROPRIATE TO THE TYPE OF PUBLIC RECORD AND TO REFLECT THE STAFF AND BUDGETARY RESOURCES OF THE GOVERNMENTAL UNIT; AND

(2) INCLUDE PUBLICATION OF PUBLIC RECORDS ON THE WEBSITE OF THE GOVERNMENTAL UNIT, TO THE EXTENT PRACTICABLE, OR PUBLICATION OF PRIOR RESPONSES TO REQUESTS FOR INSPECTION MADE UNDER THIS TITLE.

4-105.

(A) (1) SUBJECT TO PARAGRAPH (2) OF THIS SUBSECTION, ON OR BEFORE JULY 1 EACH YEAR, EACH OFFICIAL CUSTODIAN SHALL PUBLISH ON THE WEBSITE OF THE GOVERNMENTAL UNIT, TO THE EXTENT PRACTICABLE, A REPORT ON THE REQUESTS RECEIVED DURING THE IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING CALENDAR YEAR UNDER THIS TITLE FOR INSPECTION OF PUBLIC RECORDS OF THE GOVERNMENTAL UNIT.

Thank you for your time,

Joanne
C. Simpson