

February 15, 2022

Testimony on SB 269**Open Meetings Act - Application and Enhanced Requirements (Maryland State Agency Transparency Act of 2022)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs****Position: Favorable**

Common Cause Maryland support SB 269 which would significantly increase access to and the efficiency of certain State agencies and public bodies by making them subject to enhanced Open Meetings Act requirements.

For too many citizens, the work done by State agencies and other public bodies is a distant and often undecipherable series of activities. Many Marylanders are unable to go to meeting locations in person but have a strongly vested interest in the policies and decisions being made by these agencies. For those who can attend meetings whether in-person or online, they often don't have access to meeting materials and at times are met with unexpected closed sessions.

SB 269 aims to address this by requiring that meeting agendas and materials be made available in advance of these meetings online. Also, that meetings be made publicly available by live stream, and that these streams and meeting materials be archived.

Streaming video and online access to meeting materials are easy and efficient ways to enhance Marylanders' access to agencies throughout the State. The technology to live-stream is inexpensive, widespread, and allows all Marylanders to participate. Archiving the streams along with meeting materials and minutes ensure those who are unable to watch the live stream have access to the footage later.

While many of these agencies and public bodies already stream their meetings, the enhanced requirements ensure Marylanders are able to meaningfully access meetings where decision made will impact them and their communities. It also ensures that members of the public are aware of closed session and when they will likely take place during these meetings. Coverage under the Open Meetings Act puts a clear process in place for dealing with possible violations as members of the public will be able to report complaints to the Open Meetings Law Compliance Board.

SB 269 would vastly increase Marylanders' access to the meetings and meeting materials of State agencies and other public bodies. We urge a favorable report.