



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 375

Open Meetings Act - Application and Enhanced Requirements
(Maryland State Agency Transparency Act of 2022)

Date: February 15, 2022

Position: **Support**

To: Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Robin Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 375, which clarifies open meetings requirements for certain independent governmental units with particular relevance to the State's environmental practices such as the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Corporation (MARBIDCO) and the Public Service Commission (PSC). Access to meetings of these bodies could support the work of environmental organizations seeking to protect the environment and ensure equity in the State's environmental work.

Public participation depends on access to government

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) seeks to Save the Bay on behalf of its almost 300,000 members across the watershed. Without access to government decision-making processes, the ability of CBF and other similar organizations to track, review, and participate in the public process is limited. While there are many avenues for participation, open meetings are a key opportunity both to hear and be heard.

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation often participates directly in meetings representing the membership through testimony during public comment opportunities for administrative permitting decisions. Written comments are often due weeks or months after the open meeting. Access to past Agency open meetings proceedings helps to focus and sharpen written comments to administrative decisions and may also be relevant to parallel decisions at the local and federal levels.

For example, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) advocates for small, regenerative farms that reduce greenhouse gases and reduce erosion and runoff. Administrative actions by the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Corporation (MARBIDCO) can determine the extent to which grants and loans from their programs are provided to urban farmers operating small, regenerative agriculture practices.

CBF also seeks to promote clean energy while protecting Maryland's open spaces and conserving the State's forest cover. The Foundation also watchdogs emissions from power plants, seeking greater accountability for pollution into waterways, and affecting already overburdened communities. The Public Service Commission (PSC) makes critical decisions relating to siting of energy generating facilities. These decisions are critical to the Bay clean-up and should be held to standards that promote transparency.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 375. For more information, please contact Robin Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at rclark@cbf.org and 443.995.8753.

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