



TESTIMONY TO THE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

HB 375 Open Meetings Act – Application and Enhanced Requirements (Maryland State Agency Transparency Act of 2022)

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

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The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation at all levels of government. The League further believes that governmental bodies must protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings, and making public records accessible.

This bill updates and makes consistent the transparency requirements for twenty state government entities that make important fiscal and or policy decisions that have direct impact on the public interest. These requirements include: compliance with the Open Meetings Act, making agendas available 48 hours in advance of each meeting (except in cases of an emergency meeting) along with documents, testimony, minutes from previous meetings and any other materials that will be considered at the open meeting.

It also requires that minutes from previous meetings be publicly available no more than 2 business days after the minutes are approved. Except for the Stadium Authority which sometimes meets by telephone, all bodies are required to live video stream their proceedings and the Stadium Authority must make available audio streaming of their meetings. Both video and audio recordings must be archived and available to the public on the body's website for at least 5 years.

An exception to these requirements is when these public bodies are meeting for project site visits or educational field tours where no organization business is conducted.

When fiscal and policy decisions are made, the public who funds these agencies and is impacted by their actions, has a right to know what actions are being taken, how the decision was made and the reason for the decision. We thank the sponsors for submitting this bill and bringing the proceedings of these public bodies out of the shadows into the sunlight.

We urge a favorable report on HB 375.