

**Health and Government Operations Committee**

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**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 375**  
***Open Meetings Act - Application and Enhanced Requirements (Maryland State***  
***Agency Transparency Act of 2022)***  
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I am a longtime sunshine advocate with particular involvement as a citizen and journalist with the Open Meetings Act – at this point, closing in on two decades.

The State Transparency and Accountability Reform Commission report identified certain statutory requirements and best practices all agencies named in the bill should follow. There is no basis for the notion that these bodies’ meetings can’t be held on the same playing field as local planning commissions, county governments, or municipalities (many are much smaller).

Specific meeting recommendations were “All boards, to the extent practicable, should livestream and archive their public meetings, post the agenda, materials and minutes for each meeting” and “agencies should post written meeting minutes online.”

These are commonsense requirements that apply to every public body in the state.

Many of the agencies must already follow the Open Meetings Act, but the public deserves consistency in the information it can get either in-person, via a Zoom connection or located online. Immediate access to archived materials is especially important. As it stands, the Public Information Act is a paper-era construction. Handling the same requests again and again for the same public information is inefficient use of agency resources.

Archived video supplementing written minutes is a powerful transparency tool. In particular, “video minutes” should not be confused with archived video. Such “minutes” are time-consuming and problematic to search and view, and video-only minutes potentially violate disability access laws. Surely the agencies don’t want federal disability lawsuits. And most, but not all, citizens have the equipment to view video-only minutes.

In 20 years, I have found that most public bodies (including at least a half-dozen on the STAR list) change their processes when they learn they are in violation of the Open Meetings Act. This bill will go a long way to eliminate the need for members of the public to file open meetings complaints on the one hand and use the cumbersome Public Information Act on the other.

I request a favorable report.

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