

*Advocating for Marylanders' fair and open access to government-funded data and information*

## **ORGANIZATIONS URGE CRITICAL UPDATE OF MARYLAND'S PUBLIC INFORMATION ACT**

**To:** Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

**Date:** February 13, 2020

**Re:** **SB 590 – Maryland Public Information Act – Revisions**

**Position:** **Support**

Maryland's records, like the government that creates and files them, belong to the public, along with most of the information they contain.

The organizations listed on the back of this page respectfully request a favorable report on SB 590. We have diverse missions and policy priorities, but we all agree that Marylanders should have air and open access to data, information and public records concerning health, safety, natural resources, civil liberties and how government funds and subsidies are spent. Our abilities to advocate in the public interest are predicated on a fair application of the Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA).

The 2015 reforms to the MPIA law were an important step forward, coming 45 years after the law was first enacted. This bill builds on the successful implementation of the Public Information Act Compliance Board and the Ombudsman programs begun in 2015. It provides the PIA Compliance Board with comprehensive jurisdiction to review and decide PIA disputes that are not resolved through mediation with the Ombudsman. The bill also requires custodians to adopt a policy of proactive records disclosure, and to annually track and report information about their PIA requests and responses.

This proposed legislation—especially the provisions expanding the Board's jurisdiction—would implement the primary recommendations in the Ombudsman and Board's recently published [Final Report on the Public Information Act](https://news.maryland.gov/mpiaombuds/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2019/12/Final-Report-on-the-PIA-12.27.19.pdf) (https://news.maryland.gov/mpiaombuds/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2019/12/Final-Report-on-the-PIA-12.27.19.pdf). As stated in the Report, providing the Board with comprehensive jurisdiction in this way is expected to improve the PIA dispute-resolution process by both enhancing the Ombudsman's mediation program, and by providing an accessible administrative process for reviewing and deciding matters that can't be solved through mediation alone.

We respectfully request that you support these critical reforms and issue a favorable report.



*Marylanders for Open Government a network of diverse organizations connected by an interest in demanding fair and open access to government-funded data and information. Members of the network include environmental and public health groups, good government groups, consumer advocates and social justice organizations. More information and a list of members can be found at [www.MdOpenGov.org](http://www.MdOpenGov.org)*

