

March 18, 2025

Testimony on SB 296
Public Information Act – Public Access Ombudsman – Delegation of Powers
Health and Government Operations Committee

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 296 which would provide the Maryland Public Access Ombudsman the authority to delegate any powers and duties already granted to the Ombudsman to a staff member of the Office of the Public Access Ombudsman.

The Public Access Ombudsman has the authority to work with requesters to assist in resolving disputes related to the Maryland Public Information Act (PIA). The PIA sets a specific timeline for requests and a timeline for resolving disputes related to these requests. Timely response in these processes is critical to ensuring government transparency, which is vital to a healthy democracy.

The PIA Compliance Board's jurisdiction was recently expanded, and it works in collaboration with the Ombudsman, who tries to resolve disputes before they are brought to the Board. There has been a significant increase in these types of cases, and only the one Ombudsman has the authority to work on these matters.

SB 296 would allow for the designation of other staff to assist in these matters when the Ombudsman is unavailable or managing other critical work in the Office. It would also ensure the Office of Public Access is more efficient as it resolves a rising number of cases.

We urge a favorable report.