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Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

SB 99 Open Meetings Act - County Boards of Education - Enhanced Requirements

Bill Hearing Date February 4th, 2026

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Michael Butkiewicz. I am an author and civic-education researcher from Montgomery County, and my work has appeared across regional outlets. I write today in support of SB 99, which formally establishes Maryland's county boards of education as public bodies under § 3-307 of the General Provisions Article.

After reviewing the bill closely, I have found no substantive flaws. Transparency is the foundation of any public body, regardless of its specific functions. County boards of education rely on both state and county officials, such as yourselves, to allocate the funding that enables them to operate. A peer-reviewed study in BMC Psychology identifies transparency as one of the strongest predictors of organizational trust across public institutions, explicitly framing it as a core variable shaping public confidence in governing bodies.¹

And the logic is straightforward: communities do not support, advocate for, or fund institutions they do not trust. This is not merely a categorical claim but a scalar one. County boards of education compete with police, emergency services, parks, transportation, health departments, and many other agencies for limited county resources. In this environment, trust is not symbolic, it is strategic.

SB 99 is therefore not only about ensuring the public feels represented. It is about strengthening the long-term conditions under which Marylanders are willing to support their school systems. When people feel respected, informed, and included, they are more likely to engage, and more willing to support the expenditures necessary to improve educational outcomes.

¹ Source: Transparency and Organizational Trust: A Meta-Analytic Review, BMC Psychology (2025)

This matters profoundly for civic education. Transparency strengthens the ecosystem in which students learn to engage with democratic institutions. Yet Maryland faces significant literacy challenges. The Maryland READS report warns of a statewide “literacy crisis,” and the 2024 NAEP results show only 29% of eighth graders reaching proficiency.² These deficits make it harder for students to navigate the complex statutory and civic texts that require interpretation, inference, and sustained attention.

While the transparency benefits of SB 99 are valuable on their own, its second-order effects are equally important. By improving institutional trust and strengthening the public’s relationship with its school systems, this bill helps create the conditions necessary for stronger literacy, deeper civic understanding, and more effective long-term governance.

This is especially consequential for lower-income Marylanders, who stand to benefit most from improved learning environments and more responsive public institutions. By enabling counties and schools to better support students’ development of literacy, focus, and judgment, we move closer to a system in which all Marylanders, regardless of income, are equipped to understand their civic institutions, recognize their stake in them, and make their voices heard.

Please report favorably on SB 99.

Thank you.

² Source: 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Grade 8 Reading results.