

SB0099 – Open Meetings Act – County Boards of Education – Enhanced Requirements

Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Chair and members of the Committee:

I am a Maryland parent and special education advocate. I am submitting testimony **in support of SB0099 with amendments** because transparency in school board governance is essential to protecting Maryland students, families, and taxpayers—particularly families of children with disabilities.

Why this bill matters

SB0099 strengthens the Open Meetings Act by requiring county boards of education to:

- Publicly post agendas, minutes, and meeting materials
- Livestream open sessions
- Maintain archived video recordings for **five years**

These are important steps. Boards of education make decisions that directly affect **educational access, special education services, budgets, contracts, and compliance with federal disability law**. Marylanders have a right to see how those decisions are made.

For families navigating special education disputes, open-meetings transparency is not abstract—it is often the only way to track policy changes, voting patterns, and systemic issues that affect FAPE and IDEA compliance.

Where the bill still falls short

While SB0099 improves access, it does not yet go far enough to ensure **meaningful transparency and accountability**, particularly for parents and taxpayers who rely on this information to advocate effectively.

1. No enforcement mechanism

The bill creates requirements, but it does not include clear enforcement, penalties, or remedies when boards fail to comply. Without enforcement, transparency requirements are easily ignored.

2. Agenda materials can still be incomplete

Boards are required to post “summaries of finalized documents,” but not necessarily **full documents, contracts, or policy drafts** prior to votes. This limits the public’s ability to understand what is actually being decided.

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3. Accessibility is not explicitly required

Livestreaming and archived videos are only meaningful if they are accessible. The bill does not explicitly require:

- captions
- ADA-compliant platforms
- language access for families who are not English-dominant

Families of children with disabilities should not face new barriers to participation in the name of transparency.

4. No protection against misuse of executive session

Parents routinely see boards move substantive discussions into closed session and return to open session only to vote. SB0099 does not add safeguards to prevent executive sessions from being used to avoid public accountability.

Why this matters to taxpayers

County boards of education control **billions in public funds**. Taxpayers have a right to know:

- what decisions are being made
- what contracts are approved
- how policies impacting vulnerable students are adopted

Transparency is not optional when public dollars and children's rights are involved.

Recommended Amendments

To ensure SB0099 truly protects Marylanders, I urge the Committee to add:

1. Clear enforcement provisions

Consequences for noncompliance and a complaint mechanism with timelines for correction.

2. Requirement to post full voting materials

Not just summaries—actual documents, contracts, and policy drafts prior to votes.

3. Explicit accessibility requirements

Captions, ADA-compliant platforms, and language access for livestreams and archives.

4. Stronger limits on executive session misuse

Clear standards and documentation requirements when boards move into closed session.

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Closing

SB0099 is a strong step in the right direction. With targeted amendments, it can become a meaningful transparency law that protects students, families, and taxpayers—not just governing bodies.

I respectfully urge a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** vote.

Respectfully submitted,

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Maryland Parent & Special Education Advocate