



## House Bill 717

### *Public Information Act - Required Denials - Distribution Lists*

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: February 11, 2020

From: Alex Butler

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 717. This bill eliminates reasonable protections for an individual's personal contact information under the Maryland Public Information Act (PIA) where that information is used by government to send informational notices.

This Committee and the General Assembly just passed legislation in 2018 (Chapter 40) that protects the names and contact information of persons who receive newsletters, informational notices, or emergency alerts from governmental entities or officials. HB 717 would undermine those well-considered protections.

It is a fundamental principle of both the State and local governments in Maryland that public information be easily available to residents and other interested parties. A primary method of providing such information is through informational notices. HB 717 opens the door for such individuals' email addresses, phone numbers, and physical addresses to be disclosed to outsiders. Subjecting even just these components of a person's contact information to disclosure under the PIA leaves the person vulnerable to unwanted solicitations for commercial and political operators – something that was happening prior to the passage of Chapter 40 – and creates a disincentive for receiving information from government entities.

HB 717 would roll back important privacy protections and expose people seeking to receive information from their government through informational notices to unwanted commercial or political communications and spam. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 717.