



**Maryland | Delaware | DC Press Association**

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To: Judiciary Committee

From: Rebecca Snyder, Executive Director, MDDC Press Association

Date: February 12, 2020

Re: **HB 401 – Support**

The Maryland-Delaware-District of Columbia Press Association represents a diverse membership of media organizations, from large metro dailies such as the Washington Post and the Baltimore Sun, to publications such as The Daily Record and online only outlets such as Maryland Reporter.

The press works to shine light and share information on topics that affect us all. By accessing available public information, journalists are able to provide people data points to help them make more informed decisions. Information under the PIA belongs to all of us. There is a side of the story that doesn't get told if public information is withheld. Journalists connect the dots in their storytelling and help readers better understand a topic.

The bill builds on the successful implementation of the Public Information Act Compliance Board and the Ombuds programs begun in 2015. It increases the PIA Compliance Board's jurisdiction to review disputes involving fee waivers as well as those disputes where fees are \$200 or more. Currently the Board has an extremely narrow jurisdiction of fee disputes of \$350 or more. Fee waivers has been a consistent area of concern, highlighted 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>), which was requested by the MD General Assembly last year.

I hear regularly from members about PIA problems. Fees pose significant challenges to news gathering operations and sometimes, fees are used to discourage requestors from receiving information. This bill clarifies the language around public interest waivers and provides for specific instances when a fee waiver shall be granted. These changes will allow journalists to receive records free of charge for their reporting. Overbroad requests and other disputes would still go to the Ombuds for mediation.

The Press Association encourages a favorable report on HB 401.

**FACTS**

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**MATTER**

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central to a strong and open society.**

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