



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education

Senate Bill 72

Open Meetings Act - Requirements for State Agencies and Local Boards of Elections
(Maryland Transparency Act of 2021)

Date: February 2, 2020
To: Senate Health, Education and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Position: Support
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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation **SUPPORTS** SB 72 which requires state agencies and other public bodies to make available live video or audio streaming of meetings held in open session for one year following the meeting. This access to recordings of open meetings could support the work of environmental organizations seeking to save the Chesapeake Bay.

Public participation depends on access to government

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) seeks to Save the Bay on behalf of its almost 300,000 members across the watershed. Without access to government decision-making processes, the ability of CBF and other similar organizations to track, review, and participate in the public process is limited. While there are many avenues for participation, open meetings are a key opportunity both to hear and be heard.

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation often participates directly in meetings representing the membership through testimony during public comment opportunities for administrative permitting decisions. Written comments are often due weeks or months after the open meeting. Access to past Agency open meetings proceedings helps to focus and sharpen written comments to administrative decisions and may also be relevant to parallel decisions at the local and federal levels.

Administrative actions by the Department of Environment, Department of Natural Resources, and Department of Agriculture, among other agencies, often relate to water quality, natural resources, land use, and fisheries management. They are critical decisions to the Bay clean-up.

Ready access to audio and video recordings of open meetings support advocacy and reduces the need for burdensome public information requests

The ability to play back the tapes of a conversation support comprehension and analysis integral to the next step for policy advocacy, whether it is submitting a comment in reference to an agency action, or plainly seeking to understand the underpinnings of an administrative decision to be able to better navigate similar situations in the future.

Video or audio recordings can be difficult to find, and when unavailable, might only be obtained through a formal Maryland Public Information Act request. This avenue creates unwanted administrative burden for both the requestor and agency as the request must often be designed broadly to be sure to capture the correct moment of a recording. Ready access to recordings would eliminate this need, allowing the public to perform their own research independently.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 72.

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 109,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Bay and its resources.