



**Testimony for the House Health and Government Operations  
Committee  
February 11, 2021**

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**HB 344 – Open Meetings Act – Requirements for State Agencies  
and Local Boards of Elections (Maryland Transparency Act of  
2021)**

**FAVORABLE**

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The ACLU of Maryland supports HB 344, which would require Executive Branch agencies and local boards of elections to make agendas and meeting materials publicly available on their websites at least 48 hours in advance of each open meeting, and to require live video or audio streaming, and recordings of meetings to be publicly available also.

Under Maryland's Open Meetings Act:

- a) It is essential to the maintenance of a democratic society that, except in special and appropriate circumstances:
  1. public business be performed in an open and public manner; and
  2. citizens be allowed to observe:
    - i. the performance of public officials; and
    - ii. the deliberations and decisions that the making of public policy involves.<sup>1</sup>

The public has great interest in the business conducted by these agencies and boards. However, it is often inconvenient and burdensome for members of the public to regularly attend agency meetings, because of timing, mobility challenges, lack of transportation, and other barriers. The public has the right to stay apprised of state government activities, including observing discussions and the decision-making process.

Transparency is a valuable tool for ensuring civic participation and government accountability. Other state government bodies, including the Maryland General Assembly, already live stream their hearings and meetings, and make information publicly accessible. All state agencies should be held to the same standards of openness and transparency.

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<sup>1</sup> Md. Code Ann., State Gov't § 10-501 (West).

HB 344 is an important step toward making Maryland State Government more accessible to residents across the state, increasing trust in fair governance.

For the foregoing reasons, we urge a favorable review on HB 344.



For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB 344.

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