



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

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

POSITION: Support

BY: Lois Hybl and Richard Willson – Co-President

Date: February 11, 2021

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active citizen participation and requires that governmental bodies protect citizens' right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible. This has been a principle of the League since our founding in 1920.

We have supported past legislation calling for video broadcasting, and the maintaining of an online archive of broadcasts of legislative hearings and floor sessions each time it has been proposed. This bill expands and improves on these bills.

It calls for all Executive Branch Agencies and Local Boards of Elections that have five or more employees to have meeting agendas and meeting materials publicly available on their website at least 48 hours before any open meeting. In emergency circumstances it allows for posting these items as far in advance as practicable. It further requires that each of the public bodies named above provide live video or audio streaming of their proceedings and maintain an unedited archive of these recordings. In addition, it requires timely posting of those minutes as well as making them publicly available for 5 years. It also allows for using a searchable transcript of the proceedings in lieu of minutes.

All these provisions, as well as the inclusion of compliance measures are directly in line with the League's long commitment to open government.

We question the fiscal note because it does not take into account new and ever-evolving on-line technologies such as Zoom and You-Tube which are at a far lower cost than assumed by the analysts.

When we testified in the Senate, we mentioned that we were seeking confirmation that the Redistricting Commission created by Executive Order by the Governor will fall under this provision. We have learned that it does and are very pleased. Every voter in Maryland will be impacted by how new election districts will be drawn, and we are pleased that this process will happen under full public scrutiny.

We urge a favorable report on HB 344.