



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

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Environmental Protection and Restoration  
Environmental Education

## Senate Bill 171

Environment - Public Participation Modernization Act

Date: January 18, 2022  
To: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs  
Committee

Position: Support  
Contact: Robin Clark, [rclark@cbf.org](mailto:rclark@cbf.org)

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS SB 171**. This bill seeks to modernize public participation in the Department of Environment's decision making by authorizing the Department to hold certain public meetings and hearings regarding licensing, permitting, and regulatory responsibilities using teleconference or Internet-based conferencing technology.

During Maryland's COVID-19 State of Emergency, the opportunity to participate in public hearings virtually has been a convenience for many, and in some cases, CBF has observed an increase in public participation likely because of the possibility to join meetings remotely. Virtual hearings also carry the additional benefit of decreasing greenhouse gas emissions that may have been associated with travel to a meeting location. CBF supports this legislative effort to continue the positive practice uncovered in response to the global pandemic.

This legislation also accommodates the possibility to continue to hold meetings in person. The Department only has the option to hold a meeting via teleconference or internet-based conferencing when federal law or regulation allows, and when a member of the public has not requested that the meeting be held in person. This safeguard will help protect the interests of concerned citizens who for reasons of access or influence, prefer an in-person public hearing or public information session.

**CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 171.**

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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 over 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 Chesapeake and its resources.*