

February 15, 2022

Testimony on HB 396
Montgomery County Planning Board - Open Meetings - Video and Audio Streaming and
Minutes PG/MC 101-22
Environment and Transportation

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 369, which would make standard streaming video and online access to meeting materials. This legislation presents an easy and efficient way to enhance Montgomery County residents' access to decision-making agencies within their communities. Also, that meetings be made publicly available by live stream, and that these streams and meeting minutes be archived for later access.

The Montgomery Planning Board stated mission is to maintain and improve quality of life within the county, specifically through the consideration of large and small-scale plans for new developments, management of the county's park systems, and making recommendations as to which sites receive historic designations. The Board welcomes public participation at its meetings, so I think they would agree that it is important that residents are able to have access to meetings where the decisions made will impact them and their communities.

However, for too many citizens, the work done by State agencies and local planning boards like the Montgomery Planning Board is a distant and often undecipherable series of activities. Many are unable to go to meeting locations in person but have a strongly vested interest in the policies and decisions being made by these agencies.

As technology makes information in all its forms more readily available, Montgomery County should continue seeking ways to utilize these technologies to increase accessibility to information across the state. Streaming video and online access to meeting materials are easy and efficient ways to enhance Marylanders' access to agencies throughout the State. The technology to live-stream is inexpensive, widespread, and allows all County residents to participate. The use of this technology should also not require registration or any process for requesting access to observe.

HB 396 would vastly increase Montgomery County residents' access to the meetings of the Montgomery County Planning Board. We urge the committee to report favorably.