

**POSITION:** Favorable with Amendments – SB0524 “Garrett County - Board of County Commissioners – Meetings”  
**TO:** Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
**DATE:** February 28, 2023  
**FROM:** Charlene Pullias, Oakland, Garrett County, MD

My name is Charlene Pullias, and I am a resident of Garrett County. I represent a concerned group of Garrett County citizens who regularly attend the County Commissioner meetings.

The current Garrett County Code, Section 30.03, requires that "The Board of County Commissioners will meet in public session weekly." For as long as I can remember, the County Commissioners have met not weekly in public but twice a month. I do understand that SB0524 is needed to bring the code into compliance with the practice. I must say, however, that's not how I thought government was supposed to work. Still, I support that part of the bill.

However, the part that concerns me is that the wording of the bill would allow for a Board of Commissioners to have ALL meetings by "video broadcast". While this was necessary during COVID and I am glad we had that option, what concerns me about this is that the current Board of County Commissioners has a policy of not allowing questions or comments during a "video broadcast" public meeting. During the pandemic live streamed meetings, there was no live interaction with the Commissioners during public meetings. This was a concern to many of us as the practice did not allow those viewing by video to get clarification on what was being discussed and to learn about the thoughts and concerns of other residents. This practice continues during the current hybrid meetings. We have brought this concern to the Commissioners but have never received a satisfying answer.

If a Board of Commissioners chooses to do all their public meetings via "video broadcast" and continues the practice of prohibiting comments and questions during the live session, it presents a huge obstacle to engaging with the residents of Garrett County. We strongly believe the wording of SB0524 should be such that this possibility is disallowed.

We believe that the bill needs to include the following wording:

***“Public meetings may be in person or simultaneously interactive and live streamed. A board of Garrett County Commissioners may not meet solely via live streaming for more than two (2) consecutive meetings without a formal declaration of a state of emergency.”***

With this new wording, the bill will increase the possibility of productive citizen engagement. Without this change, the bill as it stands allows for curtailed citizen engagement and weakens our democracy

Thank you.