



## **Senate Bill 554**

### *Public Information Act - Frivolous, Vexatious, or Abusive Requests - Remedies*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment  
and Judicial Proceedings Committees

Date: February 20, 2025

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 554. This bill provides reasonable relief for a local custodian of records for a defined set of “abusive” public information requests.

Record custodians are required to follow incredibly specific rules when it comes to the process and timeline for responding to requests under the Maryland Public Information Act (PIA). While they are mostly dealing with reasonable requests, there has increasingly been a narrow set of inquiries that are, at times, vicious and cruel. This has given rise to discomfort and fear in local employees doing this work and, in some cases, has led to challenges in the recruitment and retention efforts to fill these important positions.

The establishment of an abusive request category and potential to provide a remedy will assure custodians that not only is there relief for them in these circumstances, but that officials recognize the value of their contributions. The bill authorizes the PIA Compliance Board to allow custodians to ignore persistent abusive requests, respond in a less burdensome way, or respond with the board’s decision to release the custodian of responsibility. Additionally, if the PIA Compliance Board does not provide relief to a custodian, they have the opportunity to appeal the decision in the Circuit Court for comparable relief.

The remedies provided under the bill will ensure custodians can do their job without fear of harassment and threats. This will provide even greater efficiency in request review for residents seeking certain documentation and records appropriately. Counties believe this is an important bill that, sadly, is becoming more necessary. SB 554 provides practical relief in these instances and for these reasons, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report.