

February 26, 2025

Testimony on SB 337
Elections – Local Boards of Elections and Boards of Canvassers – Open Meeting Requirements
(Local Boards of Elections Transparency Act)
Education, Energy, and the Environment

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 337, which would significantly increase access to and the efficiency of local Boards of Elections and Boards of Canvassers by making them subject to enhanced Open Meetings Act requirements.

For too many citizens, the work done by State agencies and other public bodies is distant and often undecipherable. Many Marylanders are unable to go to meetings in person, despite having a strongly vested interest in the policies and decisions being made by these agencies. For those who are able attend meetings (whether in-person or online), they often don't have access to meeting materials and are sometimes met with unexpected closed sessions.

SB 337 aims to address this by requiring that meeting agendas and materials be made available online in advance, that meetings be made publicly available by live-stream, and that these streams and meeting materials be archived promptly after a meeting has adjourned.

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 better facilitates the participation of all Marylanders. Archiving the streams along with meeting materials and minutes ensures that those who are unable to watch the live-stream will have access to the footage later.

While many of these agencies and public bodies already stream their meetings, these enhanced requirements ensure Marylanders can meaningfully access meetings where the decisions being made will impact them and their communities. It also ensures that members of the public are aware of closed sessions and when they are likely to take place during these meetings. Coverage under the Open Meetings Act puts a clear process in place for dealing with possible violations as members of the public will be able to report complaints to the Open Meetings Law Compliance Board.

SB 337 would vastly increase Marylanders' access to the meetings and meeting materials of Local Boards of Election and Boards of Canvassers. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.