



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of House Bill 331
Public Information Act – Public Access Ombudsman – Delegation of Powers

Good Afternoon Madam Chair and fellow members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present **House Bill 331 - Public Information Act – Public Access Ombudsman – Delegation of Powers** for your consideration.

House Bill 331 presents an opportunity to strengthen the Office of the Public Access Ombudsman by authorizing the delegation of duties to a staff member of the Office of the Public Access Ombudsman. The Office of the Public Access Ombudsman is an independent agency headed by the Public Access Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is charged to help applicants and custodians resolve disputes arising from requests made under the Maryland Public Information Act. While the Public Access Ombudsman is independent, the Office of the Attorney General has responsibility over certain administrative tasks of the Office of the Public Access Ombudsman.

Currently, there is a *severe* backlog of cases and based on current statute, the Public Access Ombudsman is unable to delegate their duties to another staff member who could assist in addressing this backlog. As such, **HB 331 - Public Information Act – Public Access Ombudsman – Delegation of Powers** seeks to remedy this by permitting the Ombudsman to delegate their duties to another staff member in the Office. In addition, there is no fiscal note.

Permitting the Ombudsman to delegate their duties will improve the process of those seeking access to public records, increase response times, provide greater efficiency, and promote government transparency. Supporting this bill will assist in overcoming the limitations of a system dependent on one individual and ensure that requests from all Marylanders are addressed promptly.

I respectfully request a **Favorable** report.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. White Holland".

Delegate Jennifer White Holland