

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 04, 2025

House Bill 412: Elections - Local Boards of Elections and Boards of Canvassers - Open Meeting Requirements (Local Boards of Elections Transparency Act)

POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM, formerly Maryland Disability Law Center) is the Protection & Advocacy agency of Maryland, federally mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to increase opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to be part of their communities through voting by advocating for equal and equitable access to the ballot.

DRM supports House Bill 412 with a proposed friendly amendment. House Bill 412 adds a requirement to current regulations that local boards of election must make meeting agendas and the meetings themselves available to the public in multiple ways: publishing the meeting agenda/documents online, livestreaming the meeting as it occurs, and providing a recording of the meeting on their website.

HB 412 will bolster the public's access to local decision-making about voting. Supporting the access of the public to this process also increases the access of people with disabilities to this information. In particular, the livestreaming of meetings will allow individuals with disabilities flexibility in accessing the information discussed during the meeting. Increased virtual attendance or viewing options to important local decision-making processes increases the ways that people with disabilities can participate in Maryland's political landscape and democracy.

To further strengthen the inclusion of people with disabilities, we propose an amendment to ensure recordings of meetings are available in accessible formats, including captioning, ASL interpretation, and transcripts, so that they are accessible to individuals with disabilities. Written content should be made available in accessible formats that comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. These additions can support individuals with disabilities in accessing information about decisions that may impact local election processes.

HB 412 is a strong bill that increases access to valuable information. With this amendment, HB 412 would more effectively support voters with disabilities and ensure their full participation in Maryland's elections.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 412 with these amendments. Please do not hesitate to contact me at GillianJ@DisabilityRightsMD.org or by phone at 443-692-2498.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gillian Justice
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Disability Rights Maryland