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BILL NO:	House Bill 0015
TITLE:	Public Information Act – Public Records – Nonprofit Organizations
COMMITTEE:	Government, Labor, and Elections
HEARING DATE:	February 10, 2026
POSITION:	<b>OPPOSE</b>

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The Women’s Law Center of Maryland respectfully opposes House Bill 15. WLC is a nonprofit legal organization dedicated to protecting the physical safety, economic security, and civil rights of women and their families across Maryland. Through direct legal services, policy advocacy, and education, we work closely with survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and with the nonprofit organizations that serve them. HB 15 would significantly expand the scope of Maryland’s Public Information Act by redefining “public records” to include documents created by private nonprofit organizations that receive public funding. While transparency in government is a critical value, this bill extends public disclosure laws in ways that depart from the intent of the Public Information Act and raise serious legal and policy concerns.

The Maryland Public Information Act was enacted to promote accountability and transparency in government decision-making. HB 15 departs from that purpose by extending disclosure obligations to private nonprofit entities that are not governmental bodies, do not exercise governmental authority, and are not accountable to voters. Nonprofits, including organizations that serve survivors of violence, operate independently, with private governance structures, confidential internal deliberations, and sensitive communications. Treating these private records as public records simply because an organization receives grant funding conflates government oversight with public control and represents an unwarranted expansion of state power into the private sector.

HB 15 also raises serious constitutional concerns. Compelled disclosure of nonprofit internal communications, donor information, and strategic planning materials threatens First Amendment rights to free speech and freedom of association. Many nonprofits engage in advocacy on matters of public concern, and forced disclosure of their internal records would chill open discussion, deter donors, and discourage organizations from partnering with the State to provide critical services. These harms are particularly acute for organizations serving survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, where confidentiality is essential to safety and trust. Moreover, the bill’s broad and vague definition of what nonprofit materials would be subject to disclosure invites arbitrary enforcement and raises due process concerns.

Finally, HB 15 would create significant practical and administrative burdens without advancing meaningful transparency. Many nonprofits lack the resources to comply with public records requests, respond to legal challenges, or establish systems designed for government agencies. Faced with these risks, organizations may decline public funding altogether, undermining the State’s ability to deliver essential services through community-based providers. Transparency can and should be achieved through clear grant oversight and reporting requirements tailored to the use of public funds—not by subjecting private organizations wholesale to public information laws.

For these reasons, the Women’s Law Center of Maryland urges the Committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 15.