



**Testimony on House Bill 15 Public Information Act - Public Records - Nonprofit Organizations House Government,  
Labor, and Elections Committee  
February 10, 2026  
Position: OPPOSE**

Dear Members of the Committee:

Hello, I'm the Executive Director of Bridges to Housing Stability (Bridges), testifying on behalf of our nonprofit organization. Bridges has been a Maryland nonprofit focused on preventing and ending homelessness through affordable housing solutions since 1990. Bridges would like to express our opposition of House Bill 0015.

Bridges is part of the Howard County Continuum of Care, providing housing location assistance, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing for individuals experiencing homelessness in Howard County. Over the years, we have been subrecipients of grant funding from the state through Howard County. for our Homelessness Solutions Program Rapid Rehousing. Grant agreements are already written with provisions to assure the proper use of public funds, and are essentially 'reimbursable' contracts requiring documented performance before incremental disbursement of funds.

While we strongly support transparency and accountability in government, House Bill 15 would significantly and inappropriately expand the Maryland Public Information Act (PIA) to nonprofit organizations in a way that creates serious operational, legal, and financial concerns without clear public benefit.

**HB 15 fundamentally misunderstands the role of nonprofit organizations**

Nonprofit organizations are not governmental units, nor are we instrumentalities of the State. While many nonprofits receive public funding through competitive grants or bond proceeds, those funds are awarded to advance specific programmatic goals not to deputize nonprofits as government agencies. HB 15 blurs this critical distinction by redefining nonprofit records as "public records" solely based on receiving \$50,000 or more in public funding.

This approach would treat thousands of independent charitable organizations as extensions of government, despite their private governance structures, independent boards, and mixed funding streams that often include private donations, foundations, and earned revenue.

**HB 15 would impose substantial unfunded administrative burdens**

The Public Information Act is complex and compliance is resource intensive. Government agencies have dedicated legal counsel, records officers, and established compliance systems. Most nonprofits do not.

Requiring nonprofits to interpret and apply PIA exemptions, respond to formal records requests, redact confidential or sensitive information, develop proactive disclosure policies, and maintain compliance infrastructure would impose significant new costs that are not reimbursed by the State. For mission-driven organizations already operating with limited administrative capacity, these requirements would divert scarce resources away from direct services and community impact.

**HB 15 risks exposure of confidential and sensitive information**

Bridges to Housing Stability and other nonprofits like us, who frequently work with vulnerable populations, maintain sensitive records related to clients and program participants, survivors of violence or homelessness, health, financial, and immigration information, donors and volunteers, and internal personnel and governance matters.

Although PIA contains exemptions, nonprofits like Bridges are not equipped to consistently interpret or defend those exemptions. This bill increases the risk of accidental disclosure, legal liability, and erosion of trust between nonprofits and the communities they serve.

**HB 15 may discourage nonprofits from partnering with the State**

Public-private partnerships are essential to Maryland's social safety net. HB 15 creates a strong disincentive for nonprofits to apply for state grants or accept public funding, particularly smaller or community-based organizations.

If enacted, this bill may reduce the number of nonprofits willing to partner with the State, concentrate public funding among larger organizations with legal capacity, undermine innovation and community-based solutions, and ultimately weaken services available to Maryland residents.

#### **Existing accountability mechanisms already provide transparency**

Nonprofits receiving public funds are already subject to robust oversight, including grant agreements and reporting requirements, state and local audits, IRS Form 990 public disclosures, board governance and fiduciary obligations, and programmatic monitoring by funding agencies.

HB 15 does not fill an accountability gap; it duplicates and expands oversight in an unnecessary way.

#### **Conclusion**

We respectfully urge the Committee to issue an **unfavorable report on House Bill 15**. Transparency in government is essential, but extending the Public Information Act to independent nonprofit organizations simply because they receive public funding is a sweeping policy change with serious unintended consequences.

Maryland's nonprofits are partners in serving the public good not government agencies and should not be regulated as such.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



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