



**TESTIMONY
TO THE
SENATE
EDUCATION,**

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

**SB 072 Open Meetings Act - Requirements for State Agencies and Local Boards of Elections
(Maryland Transparency Act of 2021)**

POSITION: Support

BY: Lois Hybl and Richard Wilson – Co-Presidents

Date: February 2, 2021

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active citizen participation and requires that governmental bodies protect citizens' right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible. This has been a principle of the League since our founding in 1920.

We have supported past legislation calling for video broadcasting, and the maintaining of an online archive of broadcasts of legislative hearings and floor sessions each time it has been proposed. This bill expands and improves of these bills.

It calls for all Executive Branch Agencies and Local Boards of Elections that have five or more employees to have meeting agendas and meeting materials publicly available on their website at least 48 hours before any open meeting. In emergency circumstances it allows for posting these items as far in advance as practicable. It further requires that each of the public bodies named above provide live video or audio streaming of their proceedings and maintain an unedited archive of these recordings. In addition, it requires timely posting of those minutes as well as making them publicly available for 5 years. It also allows for using a searchable transcript of the proceedings in lieu of minutes.

All of these provisions, as well as the inclusion of compliance measures are directly in line with the League's long commitment to open government.

We have spoken with the bill sponsors about whether the Governor's Redistricting Commission that he has created via Executive Order will fall under the requirements of this bill. We have been informed that they have sought an opinion on the from the Attorney General. If this turns out not to be the case, we strongly recommend that the bill include the Redistricting Commission. The important work of this body that will impact every voter of the state should be done in the light of day with the most opportunity for public scrutiny and participation.

We urge a favorable report on SB 72.