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**Testimony for the House Health and Government Operations Committee  
February 24, 2016**

**HB 217 Open Meetings Act - Requirements for Providing Agendas**

**SUPPORT**

The ACLU of Maryland supports HB 217, which would require that public bodies make an agenda available at least 24 hours prior to meeting. This body has determined that

“it is essential to the maintenance of a democratic society that, except in special and appropriate circumstances[] public business be performed in an open and public manner[] and citizens be allowed to observe[] the performance of public officials[] and the deliberations and decisions that the making of public policy involves.”

This body has further determined that

“the conduct of public business in open meetings increases the faith of the public in government and enhances the effectiveness of the public in fulfilling its role in a democratic society.”  
Md. Code. Ann. State Government 10-501.

Transparency serves as a valuable tool for ensuring civic participation and governmental accountability. Without adequate notice of the content of the meeting, the public will be hampered in their ability to participate in those topics that are important to them. Moreover, they will be less able to follow what their public officials are doing and hold them accountable.

The ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB 217.

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