



Date: May 25, 2021
To: Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Advisory Council Meetings Issues Subcommittee
From: Virginia Press Association (VPA)
Re: VPA comments on HB 1997 (Murphy)

The Virginia Press Association (VPA) appreciates the opportunity to provide the following comments on the legislation before the FOIA Advisory Council's Meetings Issues Subcommittee at its May 25, 2021 meeting.

HB 1997 (Murphy) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; definition of "meeting." – OPPOSE

The Virginia Press Association remains opposed to HB 1997, with which the Virginia Coalition for Open Government (VCOG) and the Virginia Association of Broadcasters also expressed strong concerns during the 2021 General Assembly session. This bill would significantly and unnecessarily decrease access to government deliberations to the public and press. Many elected, governing, or other public bodies throughout the Commonwealth commonly consist of as few of 5 members. This bill would close off meetings of nearly the entire body for no compelling purpose or real benefit, at the serious detriment to public access and open, transparent government.

The current system is well-established and works well. All public bodies understand this important precedent, which maintains uniformity and equal treatment across all types of public bodies, benefitting both government and citizens. We should not make the rules more confusing. Sometimes simple is the best solution.

We ask that the FOIA Council recommend that this bill *not* advance.

Please contact VPA lobbyist Mark Hickman (mark@commonwealthstrategy.net) with any questions.

Thank you for your consideration and service.

/VPA