



February 23, 2018

re: Support of House Bill 1531

Dear Members of the House State Government Committee,

The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association is the statewide trade association for print and online news media in Pennsylvania, and counts more than 300 print, digital and related media organizations as members. On behalf of PNA's members, I write to encourage your support for House Bill 1531, Printer's Number 1978, which amends the Sunshine Act to require agencies to provide detailed meeting agendas to the public prior to all public meetings and preclude agencies from taking official action on matters that do not appear on the meeting agenda.

Public attendance and participation at public meetings are cornerstones of transparency and good government, yet these principles are stifled by current law. A major barrier to public attendance and participation at public meetings is the lack of information about what will be discussed. The Sunshine Act does not require specific notice about the purpose of a meeting, and there is no state law that requires agencies to produce meeting agendas and many do not.

For example, the [Pittsburgh Tribune Review](#), analyzed nearly three years of Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board meeting records and found that the board had vague agendas and brief, 15-minute, public meetings with little or no public participation. Such practices lead to concerns that residents are left out of the governing process. While the public can attend any open meeting, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the public to formulate meaningful input or decide to attend if they do not know what's on the agenda.

Local governance is adversely affected by this practice as well. The lack of an agenda creates a barrier to access for residents with a vested interest and potentially valuable input on specific issues, leaving the agency under-informed. Without notice of the agenda, local experts cannot prepare their own research and questions for the meeting. Without these measured and educated contributions, government is further insulating itself to its own research without taking outside comments into consideration.

House Bill 1531 will promote transparency and public participation in governance by requiring agencies to publish a meeting agenda ahead of time. States such as California, Connecticut, Nebraska, Utah, and others already have a requirement that agendas be published before open meetings. It is time that Pennsylvania joins them in promoting public access and participation at public meetings.

Sunshine Week is March 11-17, and is intended to educate the public about the importance of open government and the dangers of excessive and unnecessary secrecy. We encourage a positive vote in the House State Government Committee. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Holly Lubart".

Holly Lubart