

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

PUBLIC HEARING

**B20-471, Advisory Neighborhood Commissions Transparency
Amendment Act of 2014**

**B20-660, Transparency of Boards, Commissions, and
Task Forces Act of 2014**

**Testimony of Traci L. Hughes
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Board of Ethics and Government Accountability**

**Tuesday, September 30, 2014
11:00 A.M.
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Room 412
Washington, D.C. 20004**

Good morning, Chairperson McDuffie and members of the Committee. I am Traci Hughes, Director of the Office of Open Government – an independent office under the Board of Ethics and Government Accountability (BEGA). I am pleased to be here today to testify about Bill 20-660, Transparency of Boards, Commissions, and Task Forces Act of 2014 and B20-471, Advisory Neighborhood Commissions Transparency Amendment Act of 2014.

It is the mission of the Office of Open Government to ensure that government operations at every level are transparent, open to the public and promote civic engagement. Specifically, my office is charged with the oversight of all public bodies to ensure compliance with the Open Meetings Act. Additionally, the Office of Open government ensures agency compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, and recommends policies and procedures to agencies and the Executive with the aim of promoting greater transparency and ease of access to information regarding government operations.

On January 25th of this year, I announced the launch of our redesigned website. Currently, the website is the only central [repository](#) of boards and commissions meeting dates, agendas and administrative materials. The site was developed to provide all boards and commissions with the ability to upload all documents easily, and within the time constraints imposed by the Open Meetings Act.

Prior to the site being launched, many boards and commissions were not in compliance with the Open Meetings Act because they did not have the administrative support to do so. Some did not have a web presence at all. Others were out of compliance because the web-posting process at governing agencies simply took too long. Meeting notices and agendas were posted with less than 48 hours or two-business days' notice, and meeting minutes were posted well beyond the three-business day turnaround, if at all.

The Boards and Commissions portion of the BEGA website is simple and intuitive. Points of contact for boards and commissions have administrative access to just that portion of the site, and may upload information directly to the website themselves. This is possible because the BEGA site is independently maintained, and my office provides technical support whenever a board or commission is having difficulty posting to the central calendar or loading documents or files.

I should also add that the site allows boards and commissions to upload audio and video files of meetings, and has an option to link to an agency URL when it's easier to do so to access a large volume of files.

There are 153 boards and commissions currently listed on the BEGA site. Posting to the site is not mandatory at this time. The majority of public bodies listed on the site has listed their yearly meetings, but have failed to post agendas, meeting minutes, audio/video files or administrative materials. Only 28 boards and commissions routinely post to the central calendar.

Additionally, points of contact and directors of all listed public bodies have the option of making their profiles on the BEGA site as detailed or as scant as they choose. Users may include in their profiles their work, educational and biographical history.

Also, the site links to all enabling statutes for the listed [boards and commissions](#). In fact, the enabling statutes that are on the site are the result of the partnership between the Office of Open Government and the OpenGov Foundation's [DC Decoded](#). DC Decoded makes District municipal regulations user-friendly. Visitors searching the site may easily navigate the statutes, get inline definitions of the language used, download and share the law without being limited by copyright restrictions. It is more than just a series of links to static PDFs or basic word documents.

Posting the statutes in this way is giving the public greater access to our laws. And hopefully, is prompting more robust citizen engagement with public bodies and our government as a whole.

These types of engagement tools are there for our use, and certainly are aiding government and the public. The same may be applicable to all Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners (ANCs). Although the Office of Open Government does not have oversight over ANCs, there is a link on the BEGA website to [ANC Finder](#). This site is open-source, and is a project of Code for DC. Users may find ANCs by address and by Ward. And, there are fields for meeting agendas. It is within reason for all ANCs to at minimum have a generic landing page, to include basic fields that are easily populated with meeting dates, agendas, and any relevant documents. Such a page can be created in less than 30 minutes, and is easily updated and maintained.

My thanks to the Chair, Councilmembers Cheh and Grosso, and the committee for advancing the measures. I hope that it is clear to the committee that the tools and the technology are already firmly in place for ANCs to be fully transparent, and for boards and commissions to transparentize operations and comply with the requirements of the Open Meetings Act. Unfortunately for the latter, many are simply failing to avail themselves of the tools simply because they are not mandated to do so. For that reason, my office will put forward a rulemaking in the coming weeks that will make posting to the central calendar mandatory for all boards and commissions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you may have.

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